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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program designed to increase student motivation to complete homework assignments. The targeted population consisted of 3rd, 4th, 9th, and 10th grade students attending schools in the Midwest. Analysis of probable cause data reveals that parental involvement can be insufficient and misdirected. Homework can lack relevance to content material, skills, and students' lives. Students may lack organizational skills and homework strategies to complete homework assignments. Data also indicates that poor student attendance can influence homework completion. A review of solution strategies resulted in the selection of two major categories of intervention: direct instruction of organizational and homework strategies, and the development and implementation of individualized student homework contracts to increase student motivation to complete homework assignments. A comparison of the results of the pre-and post-intervention surveys was mixed. Post-intervention data at the high school sites showed that the homework completion rate did not change significantly. Although the results at the high school were not dramatic, the interventions for some individual students were extremely effective. All sites believed that the most successful and influential parts of the intervention for students was to stress the teaching of homework and organizational skills coupled with increasing parental involvement. (Contains 28 references, 11 appendixes, and 6 figures.) (JDM)

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STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT MOTIVATION TO COMPLETE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

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Abstract

This report describes a program for increasing student motivation in order to complete homework assignments. The targeted population consisted of third and fourth grade elementary students and ninth and tenth grade high school students. Student failure to complete homework assignments was documented through data revealed by pre and post surveys of students' attitudes toward homework and the number of homework assignments completed.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that parental involvement can be insufficient and misdirected. Homework can lack relevance to content materials, skills, and students' lives. Students may lack organizational skills and homework strategies to complete homework assignments. Probable cause data also indicated that poor student attendance can influence homework completion.

A review of literature solution strategies resulted in the selection of two major categories of intervention: direct instruction of organizational and homework strategies for grades three, four, nine, and ten; and the development and implementation of an individualized student homework contract to increase student motivation to complete homework assignments.

Comparison of the results of the pre and post intervention surveys was mixed. Post intervention data indicated that the homework completion rate at the elementary schools increased significantly. The post intervention data at the high school sites showed that the homework completion rate was not significantly changed. It should be noted that while the results at the high school sites were not as dramatic, for some individual students the intervention appeared extremely effective.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students of the targeted ninth and tenth grade high schools and third and fourth grade elementary schools exhibit a lack of motivation to complete their homework assignments. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes students surveys, documentation of percentages for homework completed, and teacher journal entries.

Immediate Problem Context

Refer to Figure 1 for a comparison of school/site demographics. There are many differences among the sites. First, the sites house different grade levels. Some of the differences between the sites are due largely to this difference in grade levels. As an example, note the gap in student population size between Sites A and B and Sites C and D. Sites B and C have a large majority of White students. Site A has a 49.1% Black student population while Site D has a 92.6% Black student population. The proportions of low income students also vary among sites. Site C has only 2.3% low income students, while Site D went as high as 38.6% low income students. The student mobility rate at Sites A and D was much higher than at Sites B and C. A final difference among sites is that Sites A and D have a larger class size than the other two sites (School Report Card, Sites A-D, 1997-1998).

Refer to Figure 2 for information on district demographics. One of the largest disparities between the district sites is the ethnic make-up of the staffs. Sites B and C have staffs which are nearly all White. In Sites A and D, teachers are more ethically varied. Sites C and D have larger proportions of male teachers than Sites A and B. The size of the teaching staffs varies greatly from 76 teachers at Site C to 439 teachers at Site D. There is also a higher average educational level at Sites C and D. Expenditures per student seem to be tied to the grade level of the sites. Sites C and D spend significantly more per student than Sites A and B (School Report Card, Sites A-D, 1997-1998).

The Surrounding Community

Site A

Site A is one of four kindergarten through eighth grade buildings found in an elementary school district in the midwest. It is the oldest school facility in the district, constructed in 1963.

The building consists of an administrative office, which includes the private offices of the principal, school psychologist and school nurse. Also included in the premises are 19 regular education classrooms, a learning resource center, a music room, an art room, a computer lab, a full-sized gymnasium with locker rooms, and an area for food service personnel. A special services complex is also part of the school. It includes a learning disabilities resource room, a speech and language room, a Title 1 room, the social worker's office, and Program Challenge. In addition, two mobiles are part of the school setting. One houses a pre-kindergarten program which services 30 students and the other serves as an office for Special Education and Buildings and Grounds (Faculty Handbook, Site A, 1998-1999).

Surrounding the school are athletic fields and playgrounds with equipment that is

Site	A	B	C	D
Grade Level	PreK-8	3-6	9-12	9-12
School Population	373	343	1,421	1,915
Student Racial Background				
White	44.8%	90.7%	90.7%	3.8%
Black	49.1%	2.6%	0.6%	92.6%
Hispanic	3.8%	4.7%	7.0%	3.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.1%	1.7%	1.3%	0.1%
Native American	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%
Low Income	27.1%	14.9%	2.3%	38.6%
Limited English	0.0%	0.3%	1.1%	0.6%
Dropouts	-----	-----	4.4%	5.0%
Attendance	96.3%	96.2%	93.8%	92.0%
Mobility	21.8%	6.7%	11.7%	20.1%
Chronic Truancy	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	3.1%
Average Class Size	22.5	21.5	14.0	16.3

Figure 1: School/Site Demographic Information

Site	A	B	C	D
District Type	PreK-8	Pre-8	9-12	9-12
Teacher Racial Background				
White	85.4%	99.4%	100%	77.6%
Black	13.8%	0.0%	0.0%	21.7%
Hispanic	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
Asian Pacific Indian	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Teacher Gender				
Male	12.1%	12.3%	43.3%	44.4%
Female	87.9%	87.7%	56.7%	55.6%
Total Number of Teachers	124	180	76	439
Average Years Experience	16.1	15.5	17.3	17.4
Bachelor's Degree	49.8%	49.3%	28.9%	36.2%
Master's Degree	50.2%	50.7%	71.1%	63.8%
Pupil:Teacher Ratio	14.6:1	17.8:1	21.2:1	17.1:1
Average Teacher Salary	$44,447	$40,711	$55,757	$64,571
Expenditure per Student	$6,999	$6,334	$9,436	$10,302

Figure 2: District Demographic Information

maintained by the school district. Also, next to the school is a park maintained by the town's park district. Included in the park are two tennis courts, athletic fields, a walking path, and a playground area. The students at Site B use these facilities throughout the year.

Site A is located 30 miles south of a large midwestern city. The district operates four 7schools with 1,486 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The district is governed by a seven member Board of Education. The superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of special education, director of business, and four principals see to the day to day operations.

The district serves three villages and is a feeder school to a high school located nearby. A community college as well as a university are at a very close proximity.

According to the 1990 census, the village population numbers 11,378. Village residents are 51% White, 43% Black, and 6% other. The median age is 32 and the average income is $68,372. New home prices range in value from $80,000 to $200,00. The average sale price for a single family home is $115,390. There are a limited number of condominiums, townhouses and apartments. Rentals for one bedroom units average $500 (Living in Greater _____, Summer/ Spring, 1997).

The tax base of the district is comprised primarily of residential and commercial properties. Large employers include a banking corporation, a major hotel chain, a large shopping mall, and restaurant operators in the area.

The 1990 census reported that the town's Black population almost quadrupled to 43% while the White population declined from 81% to 51%. In 1994, the town board asked for assistance from more than two dozen public relations and advertising firms to devise a marketing

campaign to attract prospective White home buyers. Disclosure of the plan provoked controversy and sharp criticism from various organizations (Walsh, 1995).

Site B

Site B is a suburban school located 30 miles south of a large Midwestern city. Site B exists in a community of increasing industrial, residential, and cultural growth. Five large corporations are located in this area. The community also houses several large industrial and office parks. Land has been set aside to accommodate future corporate growth (Living in Greater _____, Spring/Summer, 1997).

The population in the community of Site B is 37,121. The residents have a median age of 33 years and an average income of $63,198. Eighty percent of the homes in this community have been built between the years of 1970 and the present time. Homes range in price from $90,000 to $400,000. The average sale price for a single home is $161,376. Attached housing has an an average sale price of $108,078. Apartment rentals average a rental fee of $758. Site B is located near the historical section of the community and includes single family homes, attached housing, and apartment rental (Living in Greater _____, Spring/Summer, 1997).

The suburb of Site B houses two elementary school districts. Students in Site B attend a school district that encompasses three neighboring communities. The district includes five elementary buildings and one junior high school. Each school enrolls students from its own community, with the exception of the junior high school which enrolls students from all three surrounding communities. The school district of Site B is governed by a seven member Board of Education. The administrative staff includes the superintendent, three assistant superintendents, six principals, and one assistant principal (Faculty Handbook, Site B, 1998-1999).

Site B is a fully inclusive school. Students in the community attend their home school regardless of special needs or handicapping conditions. Services for the gifted and talented are also provided to meet the needs of all students. The students in Site B receive instruction in the areas of language arts, mathematics, biological and physical sciences, social sciences, technology, responsibility and affective education, physical development and health, and the fine arts. Site A includes 45 staff members. The staff consists of 1 administrative principal, 16 regular education teachers, 5 special education facilitators, 5 full time teacher assistants, 3 part time teacher assistants, 1 full time gifted and talented facilitator, 1 speech and language facilitator, 1 part time speech and language facilitator, and 1 part time English as a second language facilitator. Other staff team members include 1 social worker, 1 school diagnostic specialist, 1 media center director, 1 part time media center assistant, 1 music teacher, 1 physical education instructor, 1 part time computer technician, 1 secretary, 1 certified nurse, and 2 janitors (Faculty Handbook, Site B, 1998-1999).

Site B is a single floor building constructed with two wings. Sixth and fifth grade students are located in one wing. Fourth and third grade students are housed in another wing. The building also includes an administrative office, a media center, a computer lab, a music room, a gymnasium, four special education staff offices, and a health room.

Site B has set school improvement goals in language arts, particularly in the area of reading. Presently, the district is initiating the process of curriculum mapping in language arts to develop a standards-based curriculum framework (School Report Card, Site B, 1997-1998).

Site C

Site C is located at the intersection of two major highways near a large, metropolitan area.

It is a traditional two story high school building which utilizes most of its available space of 455,048 square feet. The following areas have been remodeled recently: the chemistry area, the cafeteria, the photography laboratory, the gymnasium, three computer labs, and the administrative office area. Four large gyms and one swimming pool exist and are utilized. The media center is spacious and well stocked with books, periodicals, and reference materials as well as with an adequate technology center (Principal's personnal communication, Sept., 1997).

The parking facility has been renovated but is not always adequate. The telephone system has been up-dated this year and an e-mail system was installed for use by all personel. The most obvious weakness in the physical plant is the lack of a suitable auditorium for drama and musical events (Principal's personnal communication, Sept., 1997).

Historically, the district has experienced and survived one major disaster, which occurred in April of 1967. A tornado struck the school, causing extensive damage to two gymnasiums and the swimming pool area. Fortunately, no students or employees of the district were injured or killed, but there were many narrow escapes.

Site C is a comprehensive high school which serves the needs of students in grades nine through twelve. The original school opened in 1952 with 520 students. The current enrollment averages 1,400 students. One hundred seventy courses are offered from 13 academic and service departments. There are honors, remedial, and advanced placement sections in mathematics, science, English, and social studies. Students attend classes from 8:00-2:35 p.m. Classes are 50 minutes in length and are structured in a seven period day (Teacher Handbook, 1997-1998).

The school offers a variety of special services and programs which include a substance abuse co-ordinator, five counselors, a career center, two social workers, a psychologist, a full

time nurse, and a speech therapist to assist students. Three on site programs provide services to special education students.

The administration has begun a plan to study alternative scheduling in order to incorporate more honor and advanced placement classes into the curriculum. A Pride program has been established in order to promote recognition and motivation for students.

The community is located outside of a major metropolitan area. It has a current population of 57,136 and is primarily a middle income residential community. The 1997 census indicates that the community population is 96.36% European-American, 2.11% Hispanic, .09% African American, and 1.34% Asian-Islander. The median home value is $92, 866 and the median household income is $36,446. The percentage of residents living in poverty is 3.81%. It is a relatively young community with the median age being 39 years.

The school and community share a healthy relationship as evidenced by the joint involvement in the following activities: blood drives, canned food drives, phone-a-thons, and miscellaneous charity fund raisers. The school also donates money to benefit United Way, the Crisis Center for South Suburbia, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Four-H, Young Men's Christian Association, the Salvation Army, and the South Suburban Council on Alcoholism (Living in Greater _____, Spring/Summer, 1997).

The school is a one district building which draws its enrollment from two elementary districts. In addition, there are a number of parochial schools, including one Lutheran school, one Christian school, and five Catholic grammar schools which also feed into the district (Living in Greater _____, Spring/Summer 1997).

The village is one third commercial. The park district maintains 19 parks, swimming

pools, an indoor ice arena, and a nine hole golf course. The library boasts 18,000 volumes and the community is proud that it enjoys its own symphony orchestra. There is no industry present. There are churches of every denomination and a large community hospital serving the village and surrounding communities (Living in Greater _____, Spring/Summer 1997).

Recently, the school principal has focused on the development of better relationships between the Arab members of the community and the rest of the community. Special parent and community meetings have been held and a multi-cultural task force has been established. A top priority issue has been to keep the lines of communication open between the school and the community. The monthly newsletter which is put out by our administrative staff and a series of brown bag lunches has served to keep the lines of communication open between the school and the community (Faculty Handbook, 1997-1998).

Site D

The community in which this high school is located has experienced many extreme changes over the past twenty years. The current socioeconomic make up of the area is middle and working class families. Many of the large manufacturing and transportation companies, and especially the steel mills, have moved from the area or are significantly downsized. Small manufacturing, commercial, and business interests are the dominant economic engines of the community. Its location, just south of a major Midwestern city, provides the major source of jobs for residents. The community administration consists of a mayor and six trustees. The most recent election significantly changed the flavor of the local politics by filling the mayor's office with a controversial and highly visible politician. The town was established in 1892. It has 14 churches of various denominations. The local library and park districts provide additional

educational and recreational opportunities for the residents (Living in Greater _____, Spring/ Summer, 1997).

The median family income is $42,000, and the average home value is listed at $70,000. There are approximately 7,500 single family housing units, the majority of which were built in the post-World War II suburban expansion era. There are also an estimated 500 multiple family housing units. The ethnic make up of the community is changing. The figures from the 1990 Census are very different from the 1995 estimates. In 1990, the community was 58.5% White, 8.2% Black, 4.5% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.1% Native American, and 2.1% other. The estimated figures for 1995 show: 50.5% Black, 45.1% White, 5.9% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.1% Native American, and 2.1% other (Economic and Demographic Factbook of _____ and Southland, 1995).

National Context of the Problem

Around the nation, teachers are concerned about their student's lack of motivation to complete homework assignments. In an article about how foreign teachers view American education, McAdams (1994, p. 32) reported, "The foreigners also found American students less willing than their counterparts in many other countries to do homework or other out of class assignments...." Homework here and abroad is viewed as an important part of the learning process. "There has been no disagreements among educators that homework helps instill in students a sense of responsibility, motivation, and self-confidence," (Checkley, 1997, p. 1).

According to Hinchley (1996), there are two main reasons for this lack of motivation. First, students lack time due to extra curricular activities, job commitments, and social obligations. The second reason is that students fail to see the purpose in completing homework assignments.

Sullivan and Sequeria (1996) feel that students do better in learning if they believe that what they are learning is useful and if they believe that it is important to learn. "Teachers need to 'sell' homework and make it relevant to student's lives," (Checkley, 1997, p. 5).

A main priority for today's educators is to provide children opportunities to learn. Homework is a powerful tool used to reinforce what students have learned in the classroom. Research has shown a correlation between student achievement, the development of critical skills, and homework (Checkley, 1997). "There will always be charges made against homework by educators and lay citizens, but it is almost inescapable that the dropping of homework and the lowering of standards of educational achievement will go hand in hand. Children have plenty of time to play and too little time to learn. It seems obvious that the case for homework is a strong one that cannot be ignored," (Corbally, 1995, p. 116).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the rate of missing homework assignments, daily record keeping of assignments given by the teacher was charted over a two week period. A parent permission consent letter was sent home prior to the initiation of the project (Appendix A). A student survey of attitudes about homework created by the researchers was completed by the students at the end of the two weeks of study (Appendix B). Teacher journals were used to record teacher observations of homework completion and student motivation.

One hundred twenty students from four different sites including tenth grade Psychology and Sociology, ninth grade Spanish, and third and fourth grade Reading, Math, and Spelling were involved in this process. A homework completion record form was implemented by the researchers (Appendix C). A summary of the percentages of completed homework assignments and non-completed assignments at each site is presented in Figure 3. The survey results located in Figure 4 identify students' attitudes about homework. A teacher journal form located in Appendix D was used to record teacher observations.

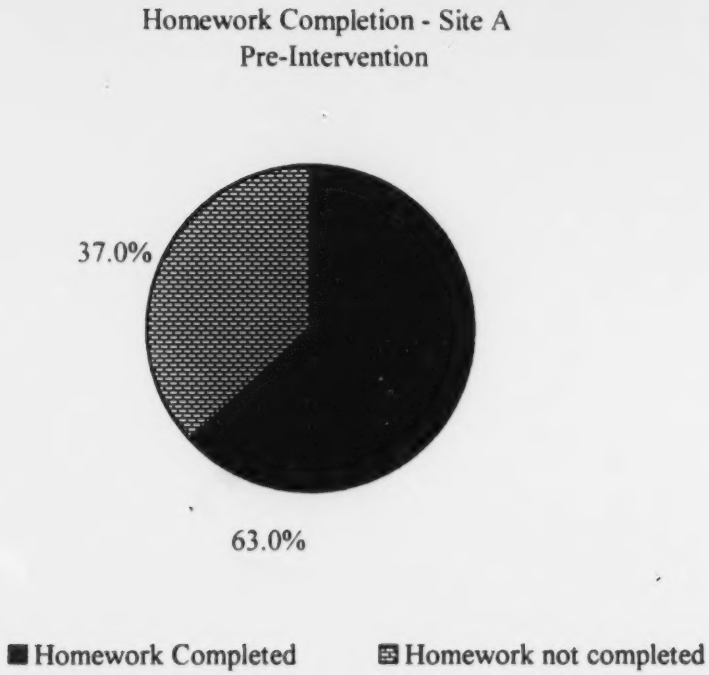


Figure 3: Percentage of completed and non completed homework

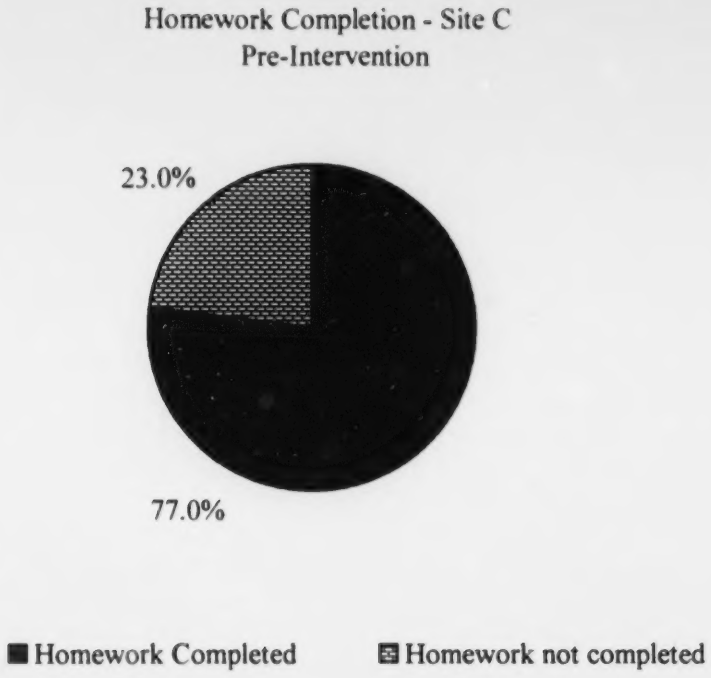
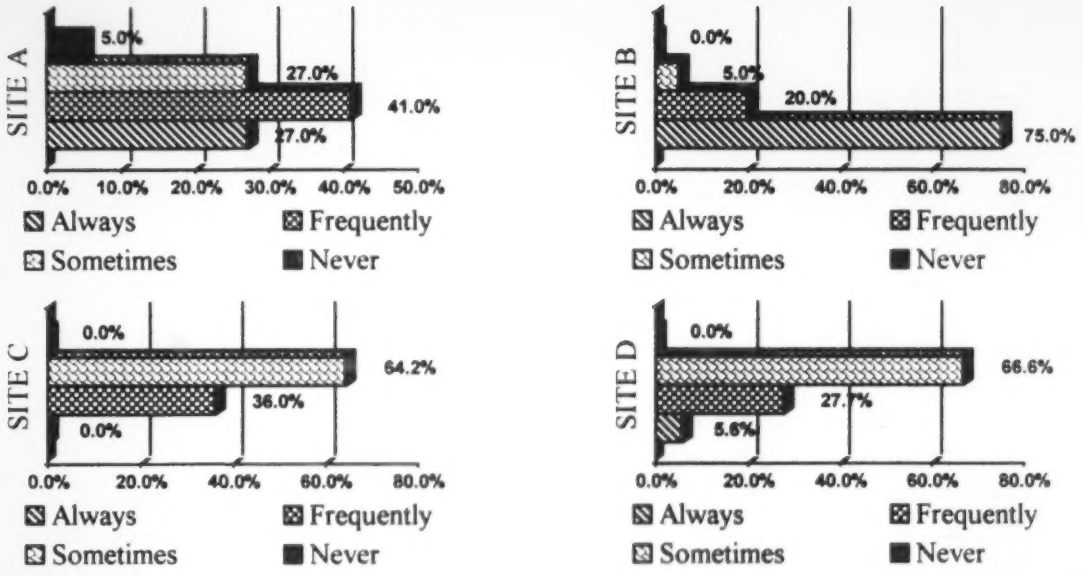


Figure 3: Percentage of completed and non completed homework

#1. I enjoy school.



#2. I care about my grades.

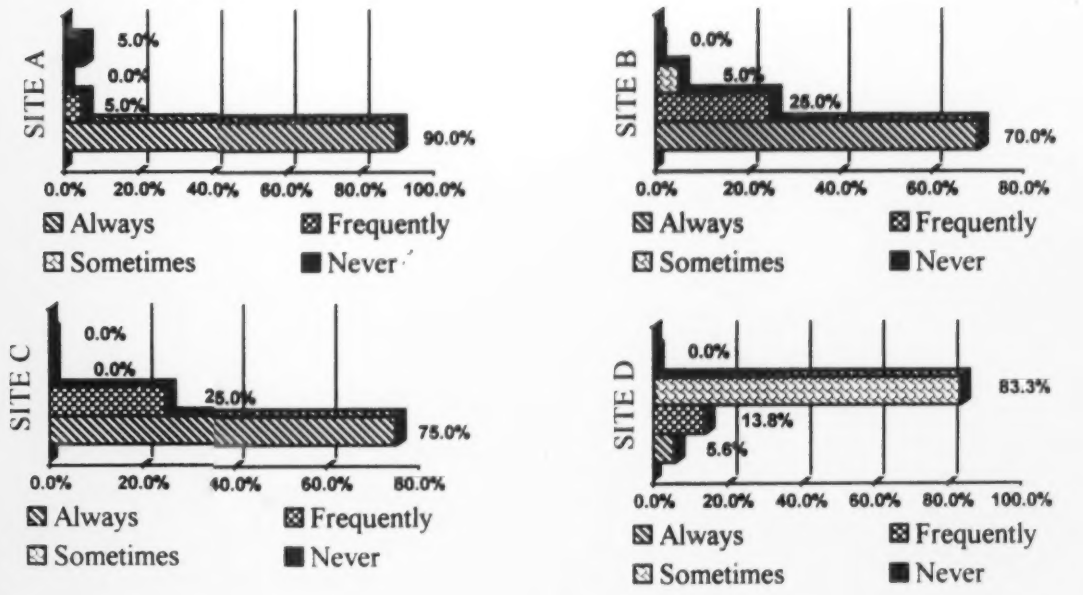
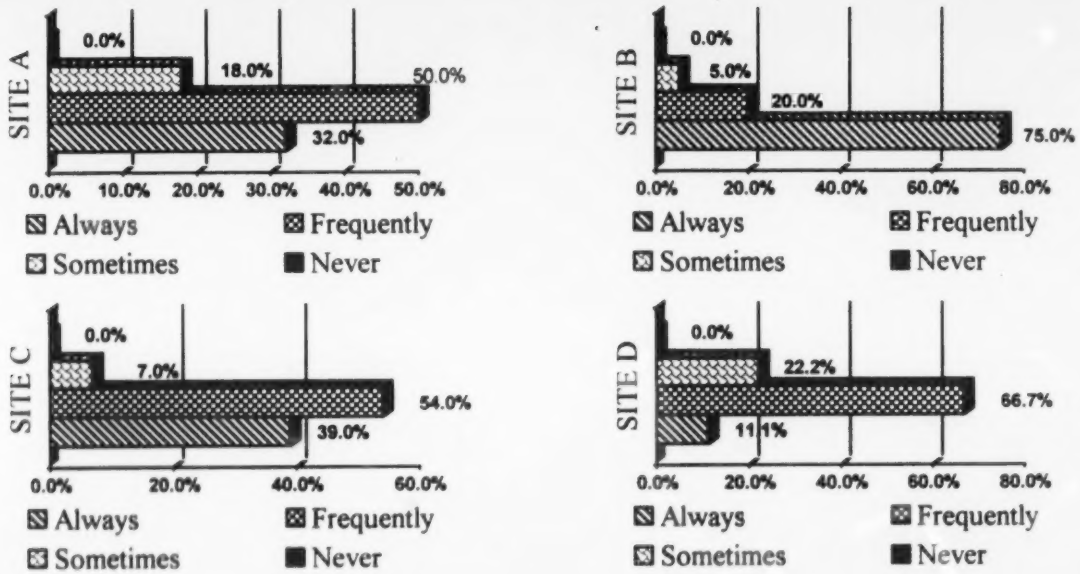


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#3. I complete my homework.



#4. I complete my homework because ... (circle all that apply)

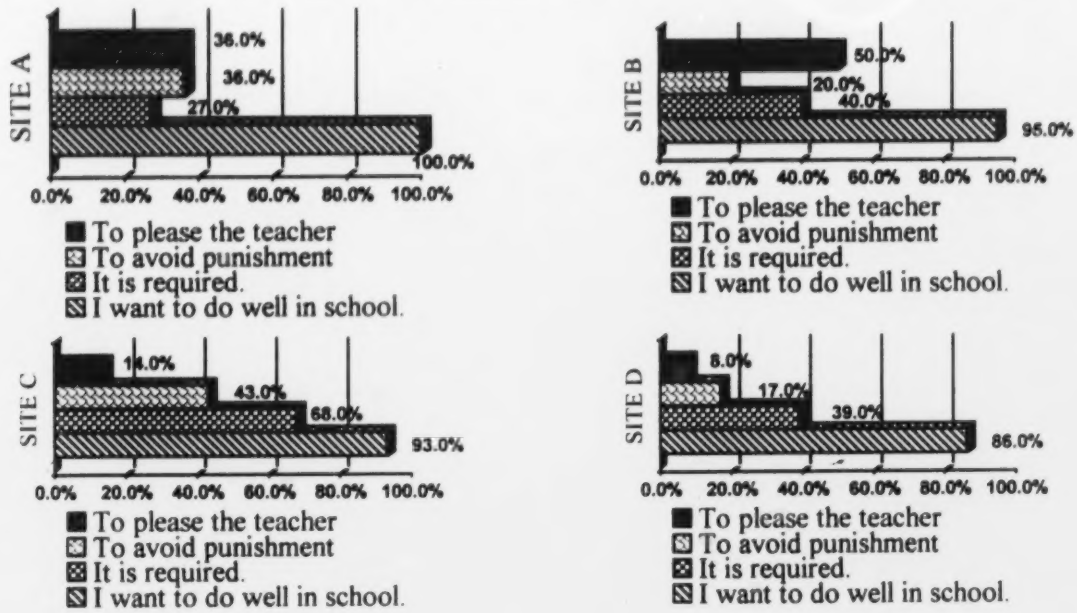
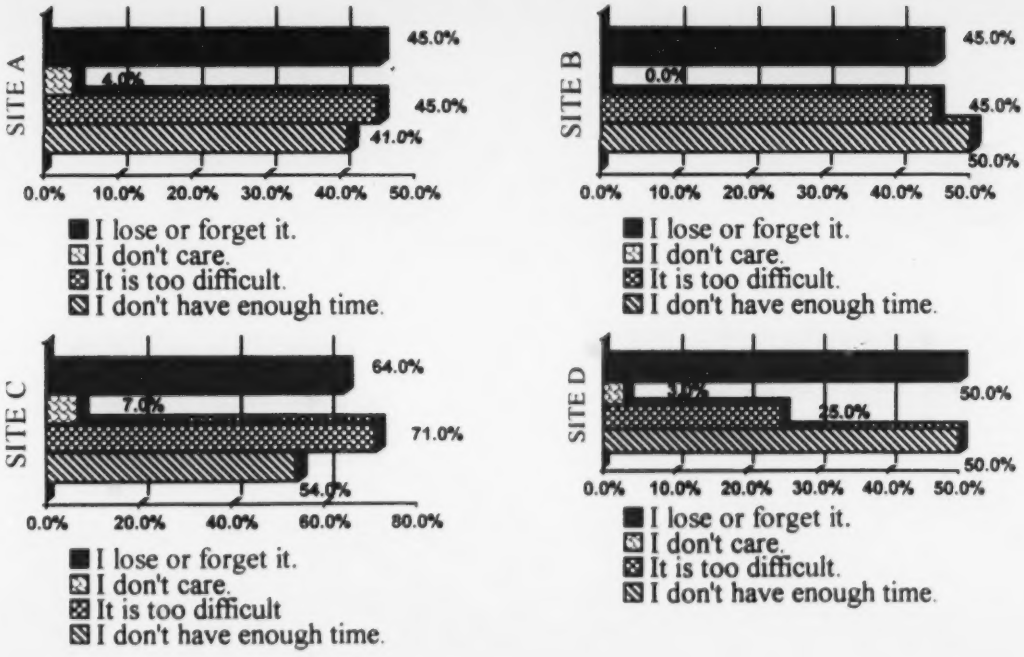


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#5. When I don't complete my homework it is because... (circle all that apply)



#6. I have a "homework spot" where I can complete my assignments at home.

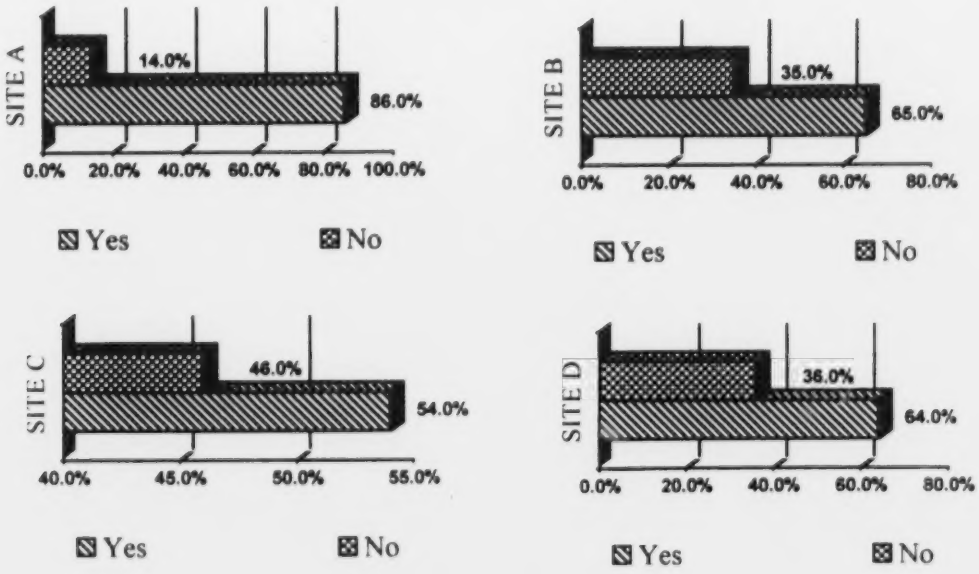
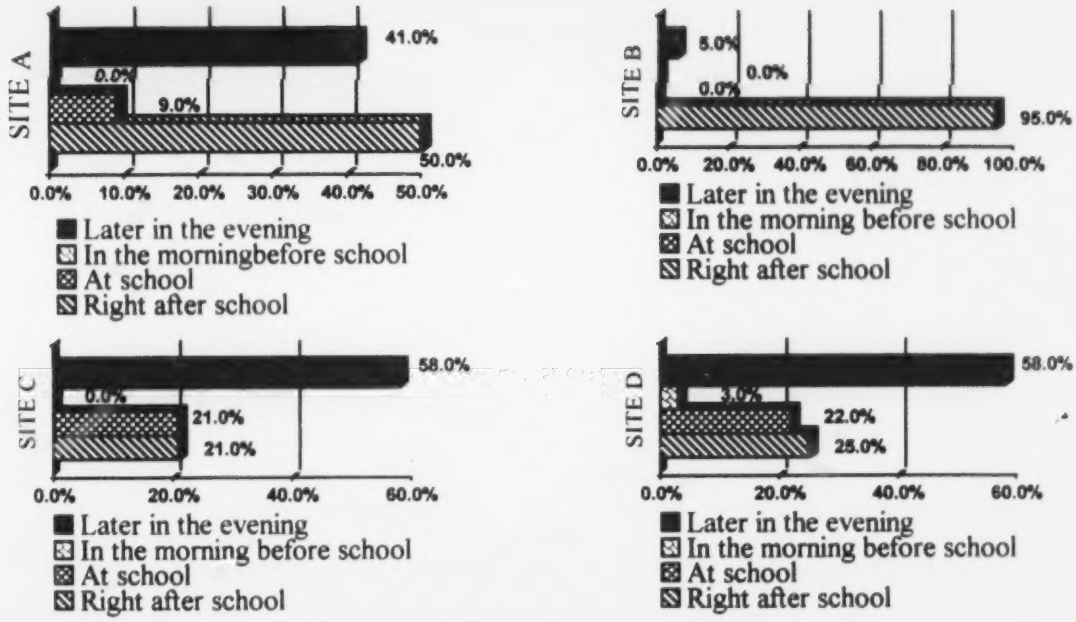


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#7. I do my homework:



#8. Homework is hard for me.

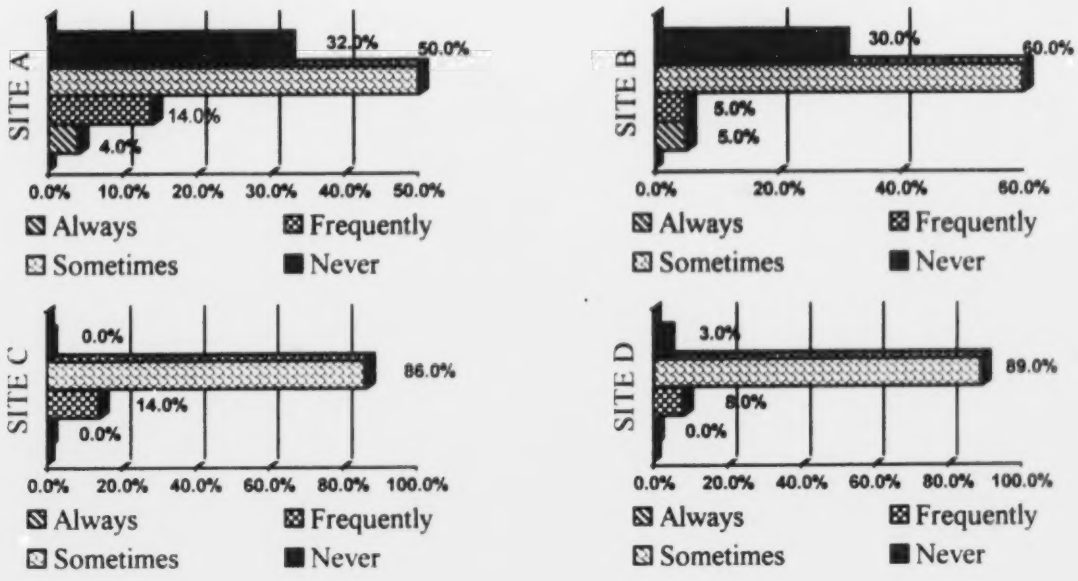
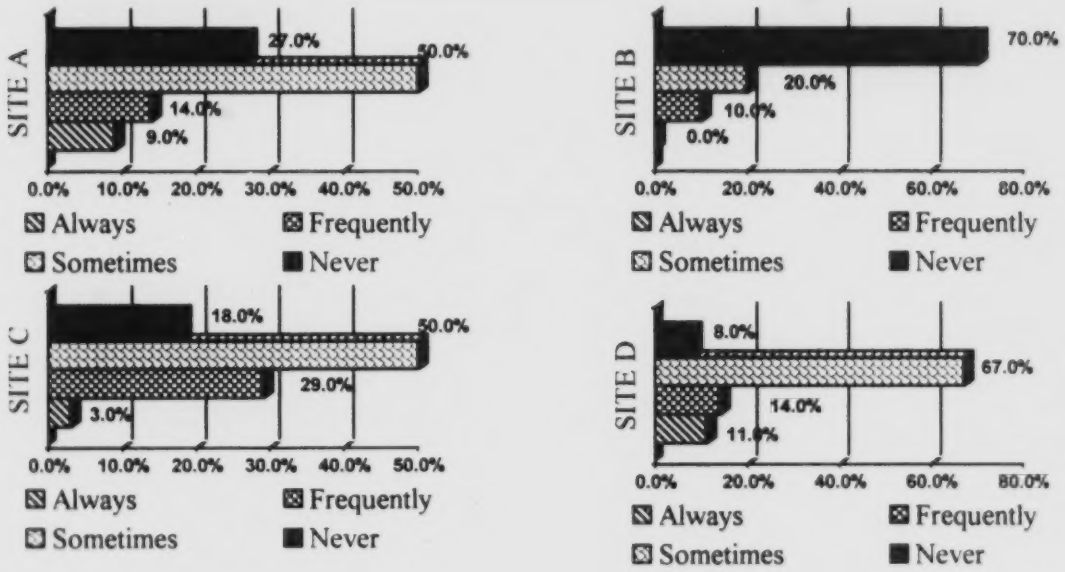


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#9. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework I have.



#10. How many hours a night do you spend on homework?

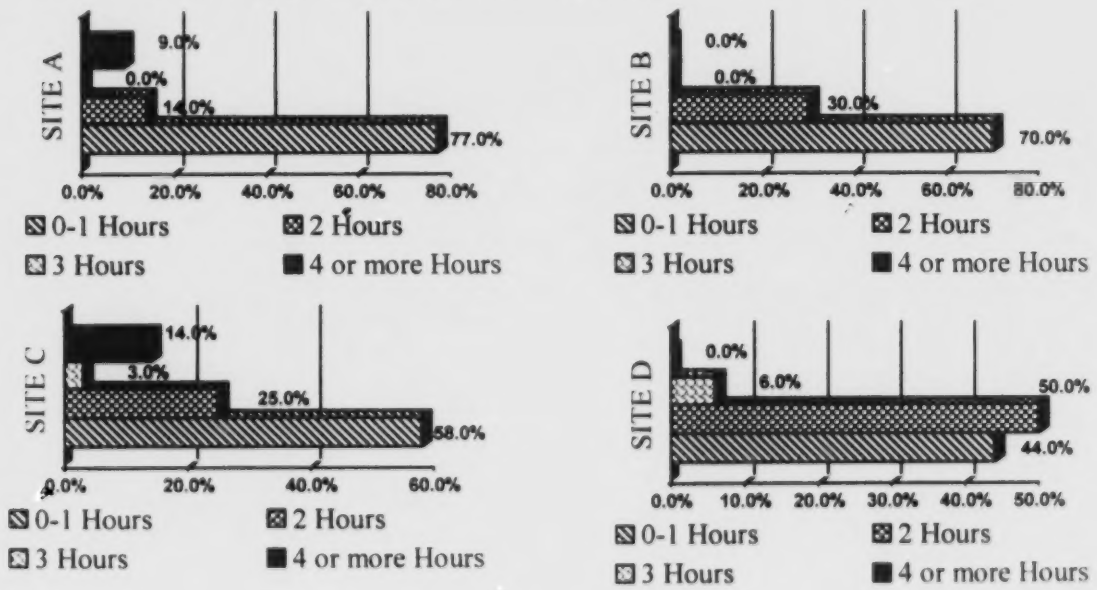
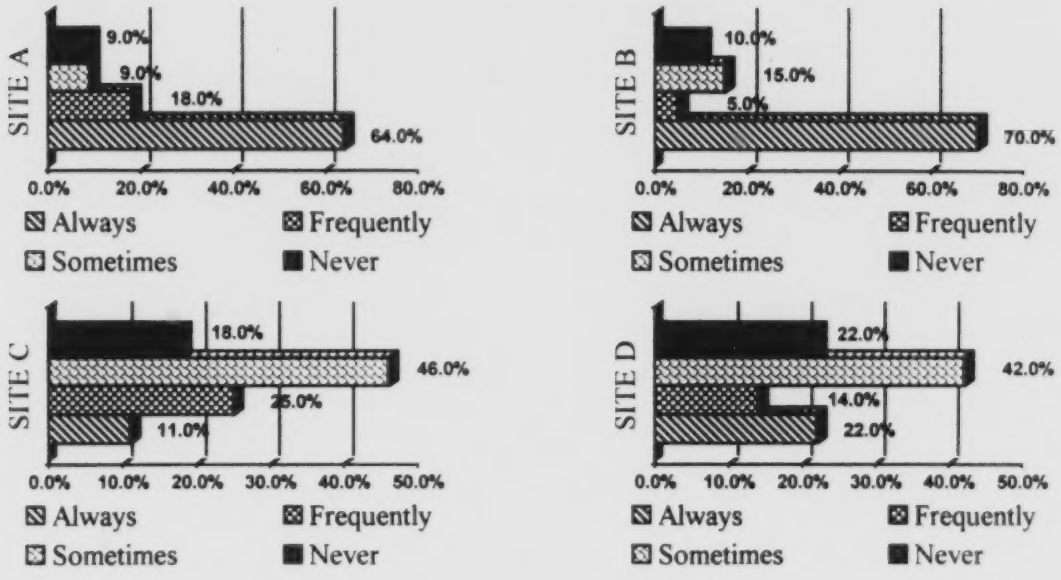


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#11. I have people outside of school who will help me with my homework.



#12. I show my parents my homework.

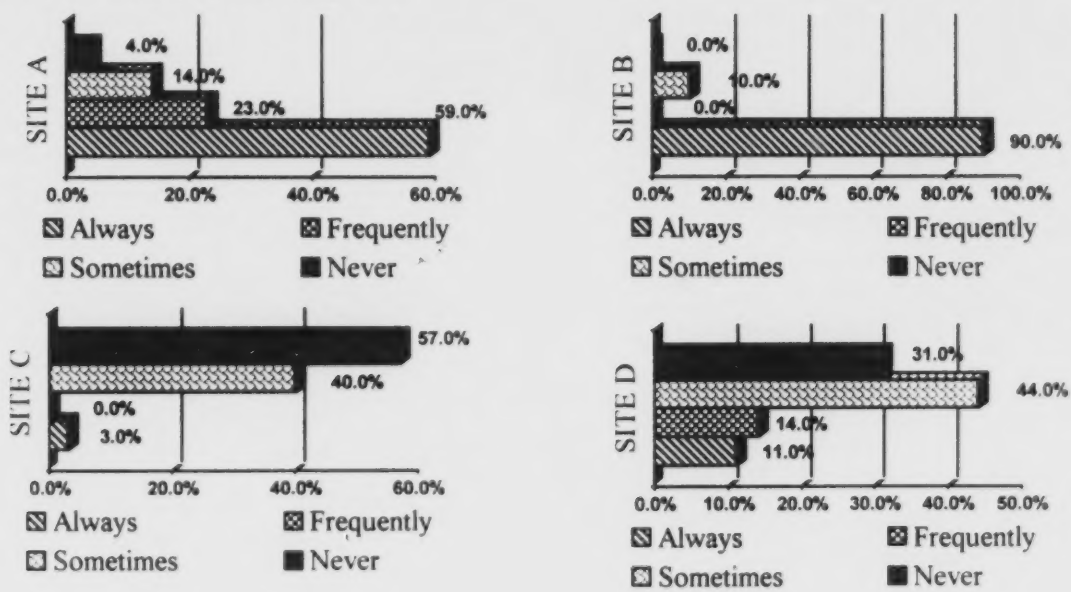
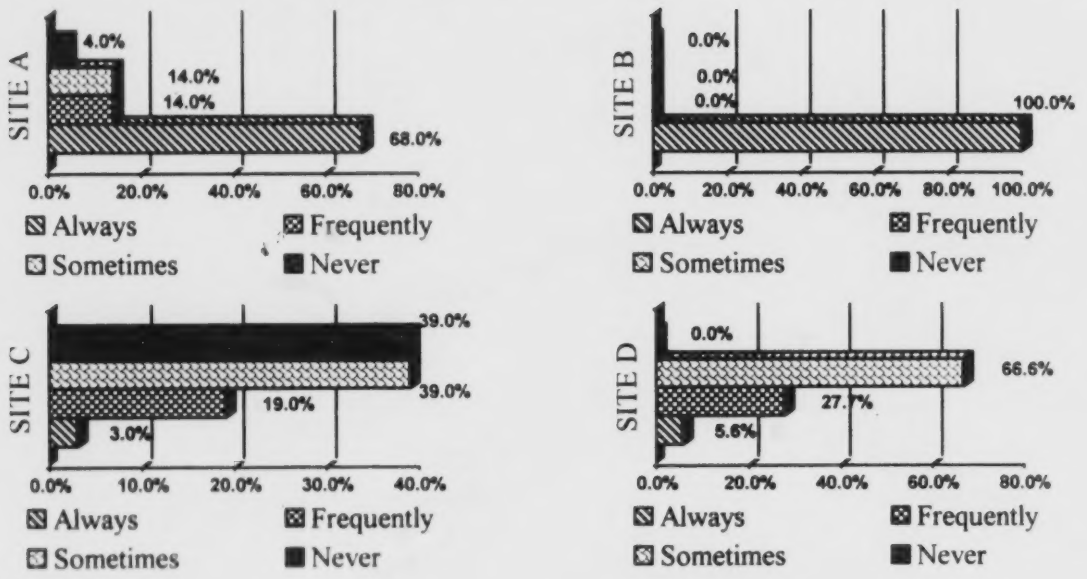


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

#13. I show my parents my graded assignments.



#14. Which of the following activities do you do outside of school? (circle all that apply)

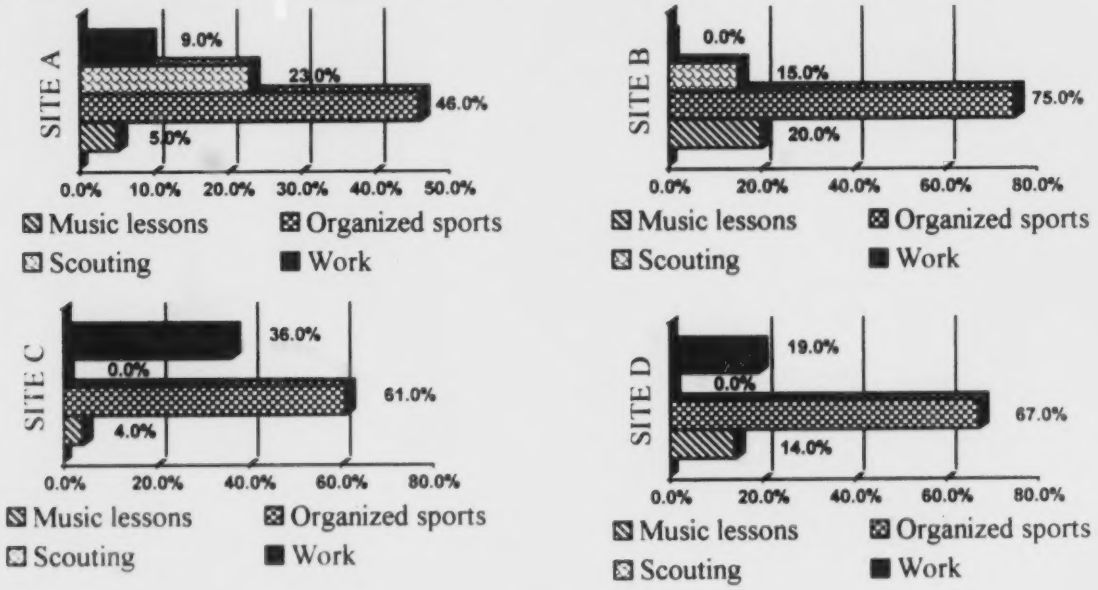


Figure 4: Pre-intervention survey results

The homework completion pre-intervention baseline data was collected over a two week period. Analysis of Figure 3 indicates the percentage of homework completed during the baseline period. Site B had the highest homework completion rate at 87%. Site C's completion percentage was 77%. Site D completed 67% of assigned homework while the completion rate at Site A was 63%.

The pre-intervention survey results reflect a range of student's attitudes and opinions about school. In question two, "I care about my grades", 83.3% of the students at Site D responded that they sometimes care about their grades. The majority of students at Sites A, B, and C answered that they always or frequently care about their grades. In question number three, "I complete my homework", over one third of the students at Sites A and C said they always complete their homework. At Site B, three quarters of the students responded that they always complete their homework. In contrast, only 11.1% of the students at Site D felt they always completed their homework. Finally, question twelve, "I show my parents my homework", revealed discrepancies between the high school Sites C and D and the elementary Sites A and B. Almost two thirds of the students at Site C and one third of the students at Site D reported that they never show their homework to their parents. Conversely, the vast majority of students at the elementary Sites A and B always show their parents their homework.

Probable Causes

Literature Based

According to the literature, there are several underlying causes for lack of student motivation to complete homework. Some of the causes most commonly mentioned are student absenteeism, homework lacking relevance to student's lives, insufficient and misdirected parental involvement, and poor student organizational and homework skills.

According to LoVette and Jacob (1995), educators have been concerned by growing attendance problems and its impact on student's academic success. In a faculty survey conducted by Adams and Kicklighter (1998) p. 2, "failure to complete homework assignments and failure to make up missed work due to absence" ranked as a major concern of the faculty polled. The one variable that constantly emerges as a strong indicator of student performance is student attendance (Schellenberg, 1988).

Another cause of student's lack of motivation to complete homework also found in the literature is homework lacking relevance to student's lives. Keller (1987) lists relevance as a condition necessary to motivate students. If the students do not thoroughly understand the objectives of their assignments, they do not take the task seriously and will fail to complete it (Sullivan & Sequeira, 1996).

Insufficient and misguided parental involvement is a third cause widely found in the literature. Unfortunately, not all homes support or are able to be supportive of homework. Many children return from school to empty homes and do not have contact with their parents until later in the day. Parental help may be limited or unavailable due to

economic concerns or overcrowded schedules (Sullivan & Sequeira, 1996). Fox (1993) suggests that more and more parents are expecting the school to assume the role traditionally owned by parents. Parental involvement is necessary for students to develop organizational and homework skills.

A final cause for students lacking motivation to complete homework assignments suggests that students are not equipped with necessary organizational and homework study skills. Adams and Kicklighter (1998, p.2) state, "One skill necessary for proper learning is organization." Students do not develop good homework habits because they don't have an established routine. Students have a difficult time organizing the tasks they are assigned (Fitzsimmons, 1996).

Site Based

Although these probable causes can be true for all schools, specific sites are subject to unique factors that do not promote motivation to complete homework. The general population of Site A has changed with the increased fluctuation of foster children (Special Education Director's personnal communication, 1998). The students in Site B transition from one school building to a different building where homework expectations change (Faculty Handbook, Site B, 1998). Site C and D have an abundance of motivational deterrents. As indicated in the school report cards (1997-1998), these sites have a high mobility rate and low socio-economic conditions. Site C and D also have a poor attitude toward learning and lack of students responsibility to achieve (Figure 4). Chronic truancy and poor attendance contribute to the failure of students to complete

work. These deterents combined with the national causes are difficult to address in terms of student motivation and achievement.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Homework is an essential part of a student's education. "It provides an opportunity to integrate and expand school learning , reinforce independent work-study skills and self-discipline, and uses school and community resources," (Sullivan & Sequeira, 1996, p. 1). Motivating students to complete their homework is a vital problem with varied solutions. Some of the solutions include decreasing student absenteeism, increasing the relevance of homework, involving parents in the homework process, and teaching students organizational and homework skills.

Student absenteeism can effect performance. A study involving eight Louisiana high schools surveying 859 students revealed the effect of absenteeism on student grade point average. The results concluded that 75.6% of students holding a grade point average of 4.0 or above missed no more than three days of school while only 15.4% of students with a grade point average below .9 missed three days or less of school. Due to the fact that absenteeism continues to be on the rise, possible solutions to combat this problem must be addressed (LoVette & Jacob, 1995). One method is to insist that missed work be completed before giving current assignments (Adams & Kicklighter, 1998).

Also, allowing students to make up missed assignments before and after school, and giving them credit for their completed work, would motivate them to finish their assignments. Another strategy involves incorporating a homework hotline where absent students could telephone and automatically receive their assignments for a given day (Rem, 1997).

Relevance of homework is reported as an important factor in students being motivated to complete homework. In fact, according to the students themselves, they are more willing to do homework when it is relevant (Black, 1997). Cooper (as cited in Begley, 1998) suggests that teachers make their homework useful and productive. Role playing, writing letters, and expressing feelings are ways of allowing students to make homework relevant to their lives (Begley, 1998). Problems with relevant assignments are that they are difficult to create and what is relevant to one student in one place at one age may not apply in a wider audience.

It does take more than relevance to encourage students to increase their homework output. According to Culyer (1996) informing parents, giving homework at student's level, making assignments relevant, and helping students learn from their mistakes are essential to making homework work. As educators, we want to instill in our students a love for learning and a motivation to become life long learners (Boers & Caspary, 1995).

When parents become involved in their child's learning, students are more likely to increase their achievement (Amundson, 1988). Fournier suggests, "If we want our children to learn responsibility, the best way to teach it is to hold ourselves accountable for our own responsibility as parents," (Fournier, 1997, p. 2). Homework provide an

opportunity for parents to become involved with their child's learning. There are several strategies that parents can incorporate when helping their child improve their motivation to complete homework assignments.

Rich recommends that parents view themselves as a homework coach and not a player. "Parents must ensure that homework gets done primarily by providing encouragement, approval, and a time and a place to study," Rich (as cited in Quilter, 1996). An experienced teacher for 28 years feels that parents should work with their child to establish a homework time that works best for their child. Parents should determine a time when their child has the most energy to do challenging work (Curtin, 1996).

A third grade teacher and a psychologist recommend four tips to help parents make their child's homework experience more successful (Fitzsimmons, 1996). These tips include incorporating a reward/deprivation system at home for homework completion, creating a homework center for their child, arranging a routine homework time, and keeping regular communication with their child's teacher.

A final strategy that can help parents to motivate their child to complete their homework is to involve parents in the use of their child's homework assignment book. To help parents keep track of homework responsibilities, elementary program coordinator Pugh suggests that parents sign or initial their child's homework planner which lists homework assignments and important school information (Toole, 1997).

A last important facet necessary to encourage students to turn in completed homework assignments is the development of organizational and homework skills. This includes determining an established homework routine, which occurs at approximately the

same time each day. It should be noted that individual learning styles and optimum work time differ from child to child and this should be taken into account when establishing the child's homework routine (Curtin, 1996).

Also, a distraction free atmosphere with sufficient lighting and appropriate supplies for the students to use is crucial to homework success. The Fannie Mae Public Information Office in Washington, D.C. found that 33% of students do homework in their bedroom, 25% study in their kitchen, 22% complete homework in their family room, and 20% study in their dining room (Fitzsimmons, 1996). According to I Keep Forgetting (1997) there are several strategies that are useful tools to keep students organized. These strategies include the use of an assignment notebook to record homework assignments and a system created by each student to make sure that all materials needed to complete homework are ready to be taken home (Curtin, 1996). In addition, a homework contract enumerating these provisions can be made between the student, the teacher, and the parent (Appendix E). This would encourage the student to be responsible in following through with homework expectations (Sonna, 1990). In involving parents, it is important for them to maintain the role of observer and not the role of active participant. This allows the child to meet the challenges of the assignments on their own (Quilter, 1996). The homework experience must be treated as an important activity which instills in the student a sense of commitment and becomes a trait ingrained for life.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of direct instruction of homework strategies and implementation of an individualized homework contract, during the period of September 1998 to December 1998, the targeted third, fourth, ninth, and tenth grade students will increase motivation to complete homework assignments as measured by the

students pre and post surveys, the teacher record book of assignments, and teacher journals.

In order to accomplish the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Lesson plans that implement direct instruction of homework strategies will be developed.

2. An individualized homework contract will be developed.

3. A consensus among the students, teachers, and parents regarding the individualized homework contract will be reached.

Project Action Plan

I. Baseline data collection (first two weeks in September)

A. Homework assignments required Monday through Thursday

1. Tenth grade Psychology and Sociology

2. Ninth grade Spanish

3. Fourth grade Reading, Math, and Spelling

4. Third grade Reading, Math, and Spelling

B. Homework assignments recorded Monday through Thursday (September through December) (Appendix C)

C. Teacher observations journaled 2 times a week (September through December)

II. Distribution of parent/student permission letter (first week of September) (Appendix A)

III. Collection of homework completion baseline data (Figure 3)

IV. Distribution of student pre-survey "Beginning of Study" to students (third week of September) (Appendix B)

V. Implementation of direct instruction for organizational and homework strategies (third week of September consisting of three hours of instruction)

A. Preparation of homework

1. Using a homework assignment book

2. Creating a check out system for bringing home homework materials

B. Establishing a homework routine

1. When to study

2. Where to study

3. Prioritizing homework goals

C. Communicating homework responsibilities to parents

VI. Development of an individualized student homework contract (third week of September) (Appendices E and F)

A. Review and reflection of organizational and homework strategies

B. Completion of individualized homework contract (one hour)

C. Consensus of homework contract between student, teacher, and parent

D. Signed commitment of student, teacher, and parent on individualized homework contract

VII. Implementation of individualized student homework contract (10 weeks in October, November, and part of December)

VIII. Distribution of post survey "End of Study" to students (end of December) (Appendix G)

IX. Assessment of Data Collection (end of December)

A. Analysis of student pre and post survey "Beginning of Study" and "End of Study"

B. Analysis of teacher record of homework completion

C. Analysis of teacher journals

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a student survey of attitudes about homework assessing students motivation to complete homework will be administered on September 25 and December 11 (Appendix G). A teacher grade book will be used to record completed homework assignments. The teachers will record observations and comments in a journal throughout the intervention period.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The object of this project was to increase student motivation in order to complete homework assignments. The implementation of direct instruction of organizational and homework strategies and the development of an individualized student homework contract were techniques used to achieve this objective.

The students received three hours of direct instruction in study skill strategies at the onset of the project. These skills included encouraging the use of a homework assignment book and the creation of a checkout system for bringing home assignments. Students were instructed to establish a homework routine and communicate their homework responsibilities to their parents. An opportunity was provided for students to develop an individualized homework contract and incorporate the contract into their homework routine.

At the elementary level, students at Sites A and B completed homework in the subject areas of reading, math, and spelling. Reading assignments included independent reading followed by comprehension activities. In math and spelling, students reinforced

and practiced skills that were taught in the classroom. The ninth grade Spanish students at Site C completed homework assignments consisting of translating short Spanish passages to English, sentence writing in Spanish, and studying verb practice charts to reinforce already learned material. The tenth grade Social Studies students at Site D were assigned sections of the textbook to read followed by answering several comprehension and application questions. Other forms of homework given at Site D included terms and definitions, application worksheets and review activities.

The schools included in this project deviated from the original intervention plan. All sites incorporated positive reinforcement and incentives. If individual students began to show a pattern of incomplete homework assignments, all sites arranged for individual teacher-student conferences to aid in remediating the problem. Since the sites varied by age, socio-economic background, and abilities, each site needed to modify and adapt the plan to meet their needs.

The fourth grade students at Site A used a homework card which was signed daily by the teacher (Appendix H). If 100% of the assignments were completed for the week, students received a homework pass to be used in place of a future assignment (Appendix I). In the classroom, a chart was posted to record the progress of each individual student.

The third grade students in Site B participated in a daily homework lottery. Each student had a monthly homework calendar which was used to record complete homework assignments (Appendix J). Students who completed their homework on time entered their name into the classroom homework lottery. A daily lottery winner was selected at

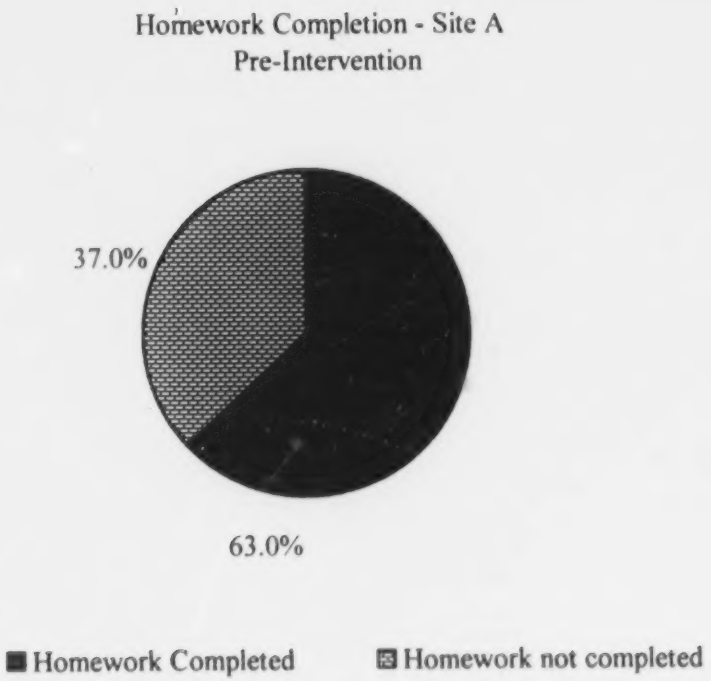
random. A student winning the lottery was able to choose from a list of incentives. As an added incentive, a student completing 15 homework assignments in a row received a homework pass (Appendix I). A homework pass could be used in place of a future homework assignment.

The ninth grade students at Site C also incorporated the use of homework passes which were awarded for completion of eight consecutive assignments (Appendix K). At Site D, the tenth grade students received a homework pass for completing four assignments on time. The passes were used for extra credit or in place of completing a future homework assignment.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of direct instruction of homework strategies and the use of individual homework contracts on student motivation to complete homework, homework completion was monitored. Baseline data of homework completion was collected over a two week period. After the intervention, the rate at which homework was completed was recorded over a ten week period. The results are presented in Figure 5.

Analysis of Figure 5 indicates percentage increases of homework completion when comparing baseline data to the ten week intervention period. In Site A, the intervention increased the homework completion rate by 28%. Site B showed an increase of 10%. Site C's homework complete rate increased by 2%. There was a 3% increase observed in Site D.



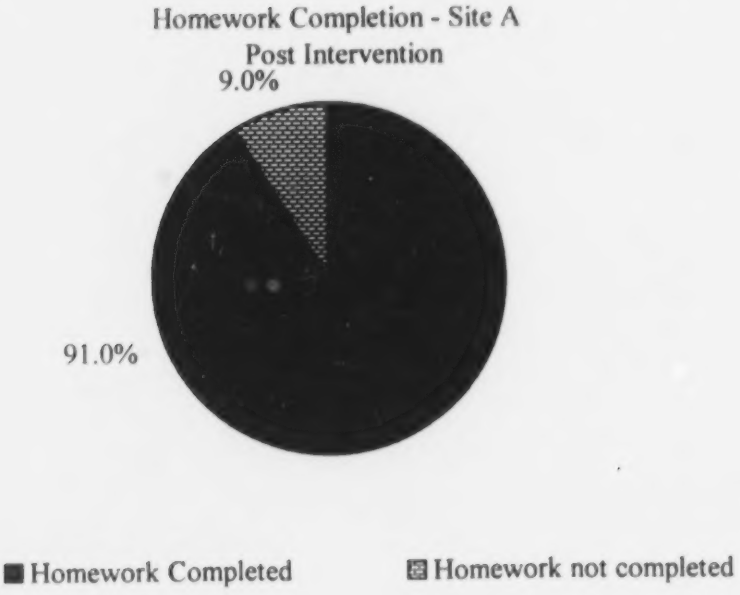
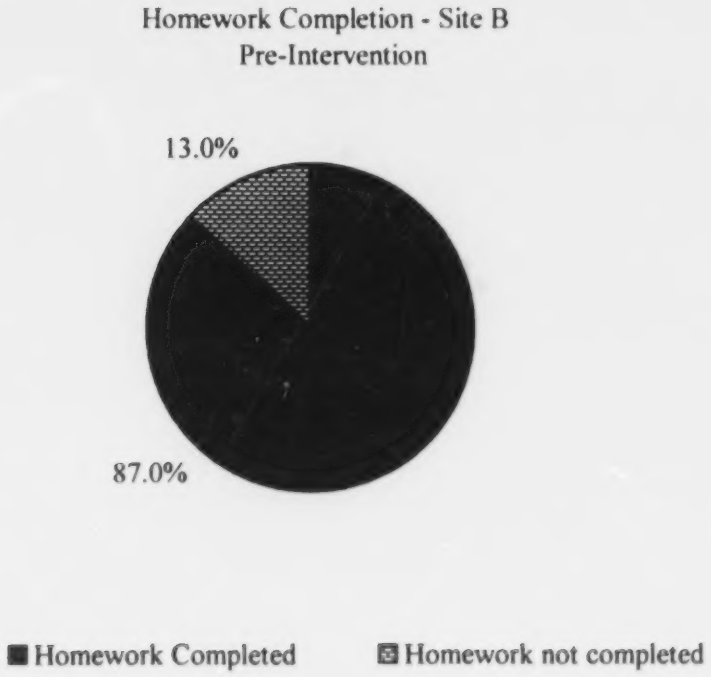


Figure 5: Pre and Post Intervention Homework Completion Rate



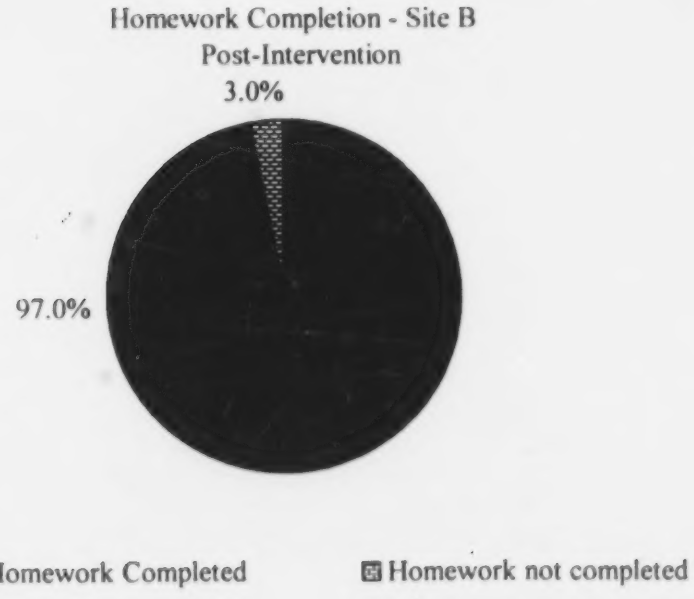
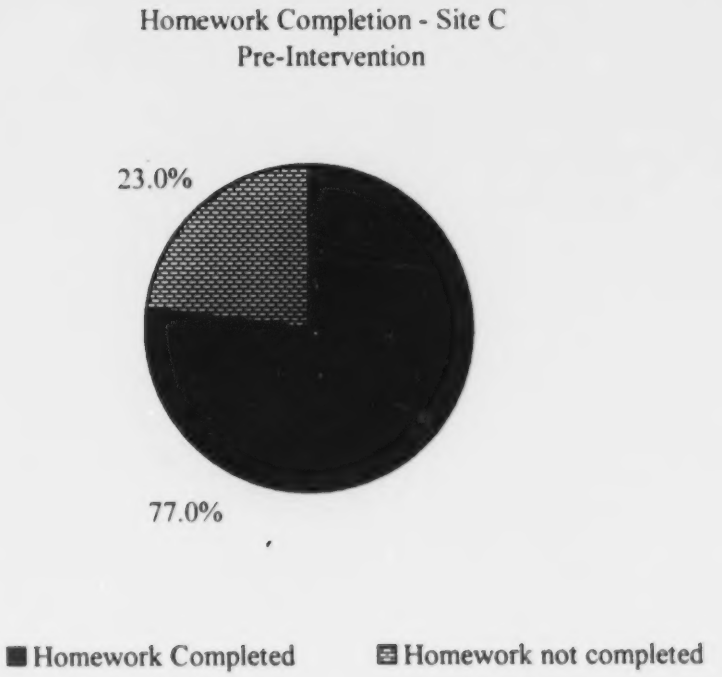


Figure 5: Pre and Post Intervention Homework Completion Rate



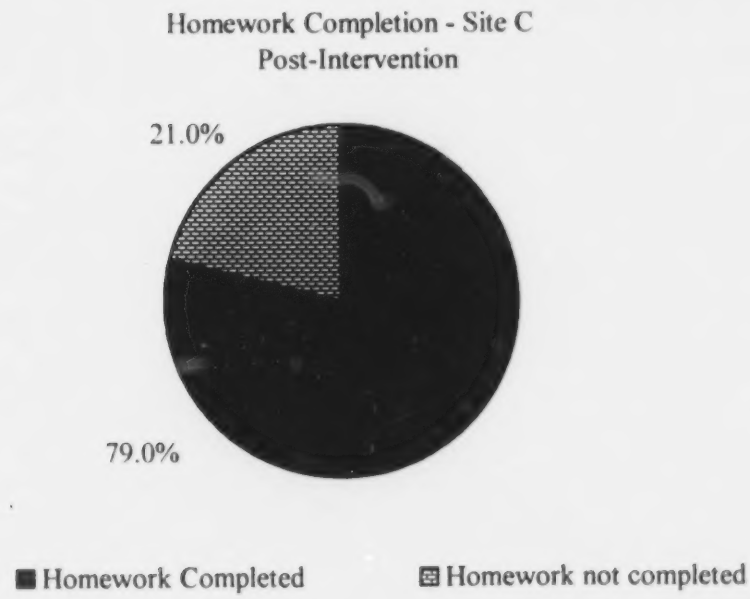
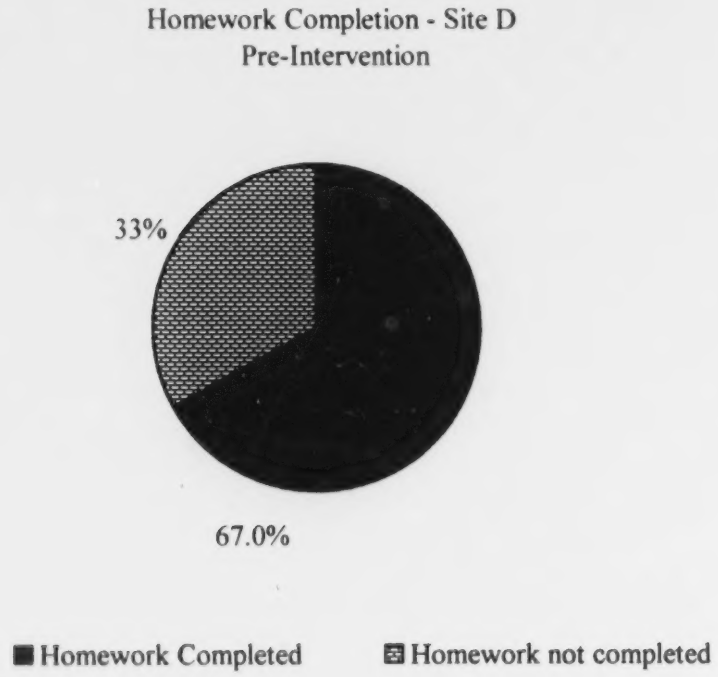


Figure 5: Pre and Post Intervention Homework Completion Rate



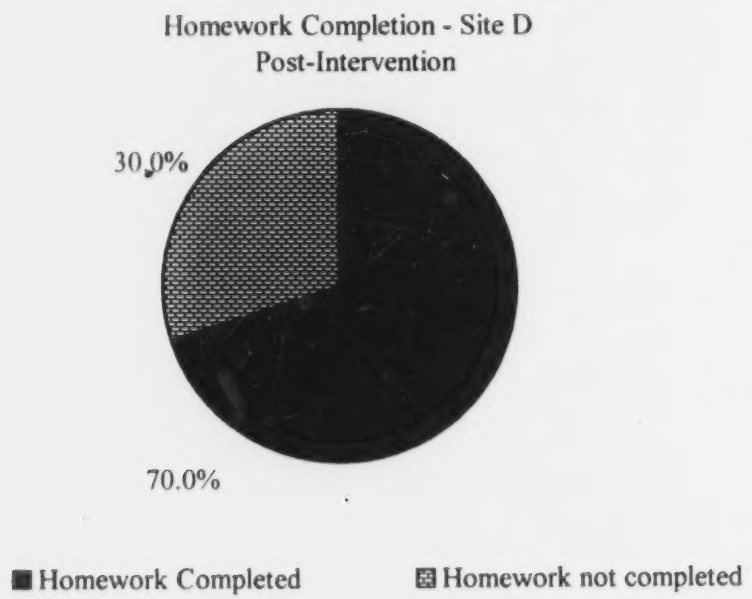


Figure 5: Pre and Post Intervention Homework Completion Rate

In mid-December, a post intervention survey (Appendix G) was administered to all students in the targeted classes. In a general overview of the pre-intervention surveys compared with the post-intervention surveys (Figure 6), the elementary schools, Site A and Site B, improved the ratings on more questions than did the high schools, Site C and Site D. For example, in question one, "I enjoy school", and question two, "I care about my grades", both elementary sites showed students answering more positively after the intervention. At both high school sites, the gains after the intervention are toward more negative responses. As evidence of how confusing the survey results appear to be, question three, "I complete my homework", shows a 15% decrease in the number of students reporting they always complete their homework. The completion rate for homework at this site, Site B, increased by 10%. The rest of the survey numbers appear to hold little meaning for evaluating the intervention's effect on student's motivation to complete homework. Student responses were inconsistent due to the time elapsed between the administration of the pre and post surveys.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The intervention had a positive effect at Site A. Based on the presentation of study skill strategies and student contracts, the students increased their homework completion by 28%.

As part of the study skills, students were instructed to utilize an assignment tablet that required a parental signature on a nightly basis. Students also filled in a daily homework record card each time an assignment was given (Appendix H). If the

Survey results

#1. I enjoy school.

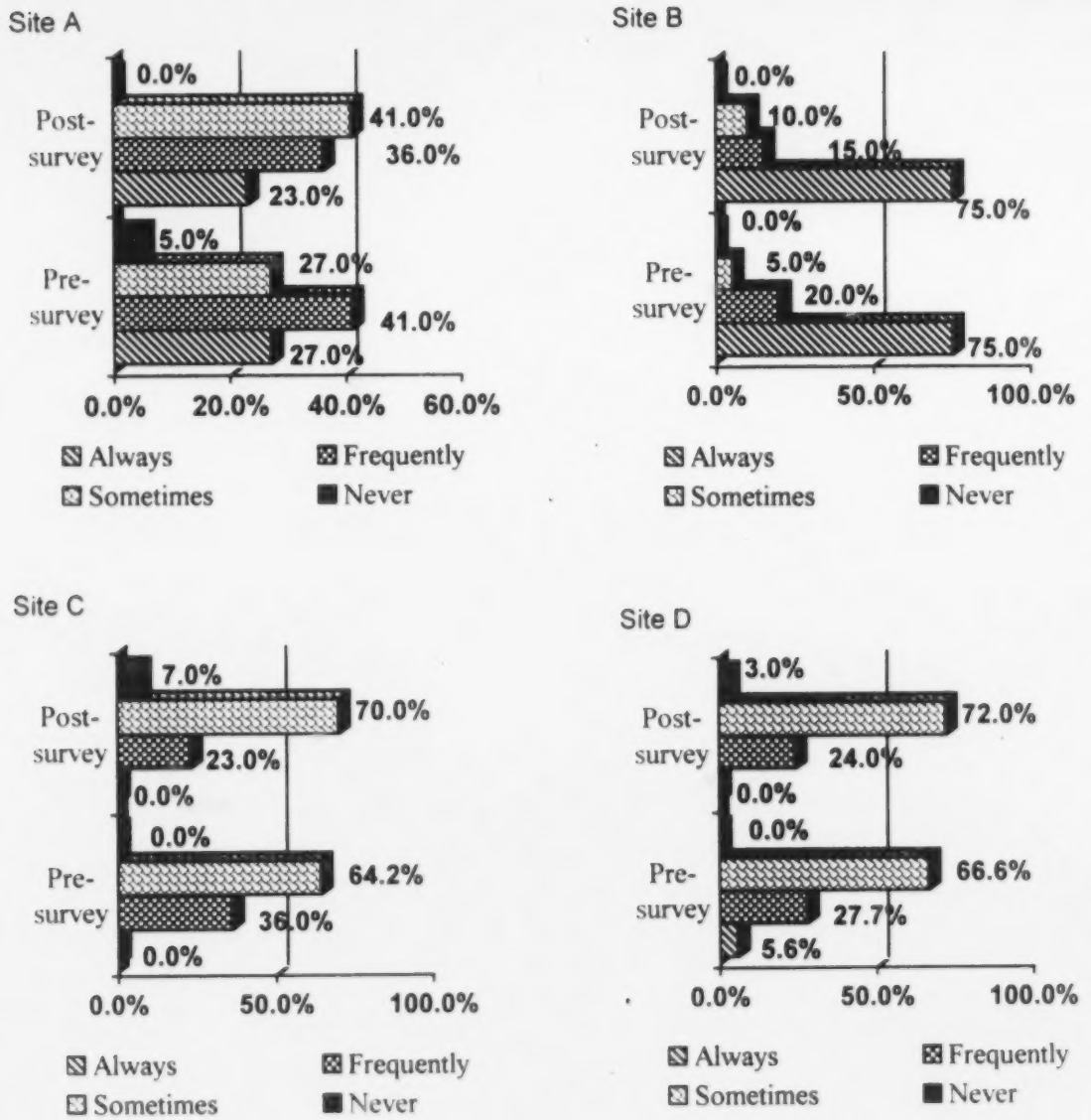


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#2. I care about my grades

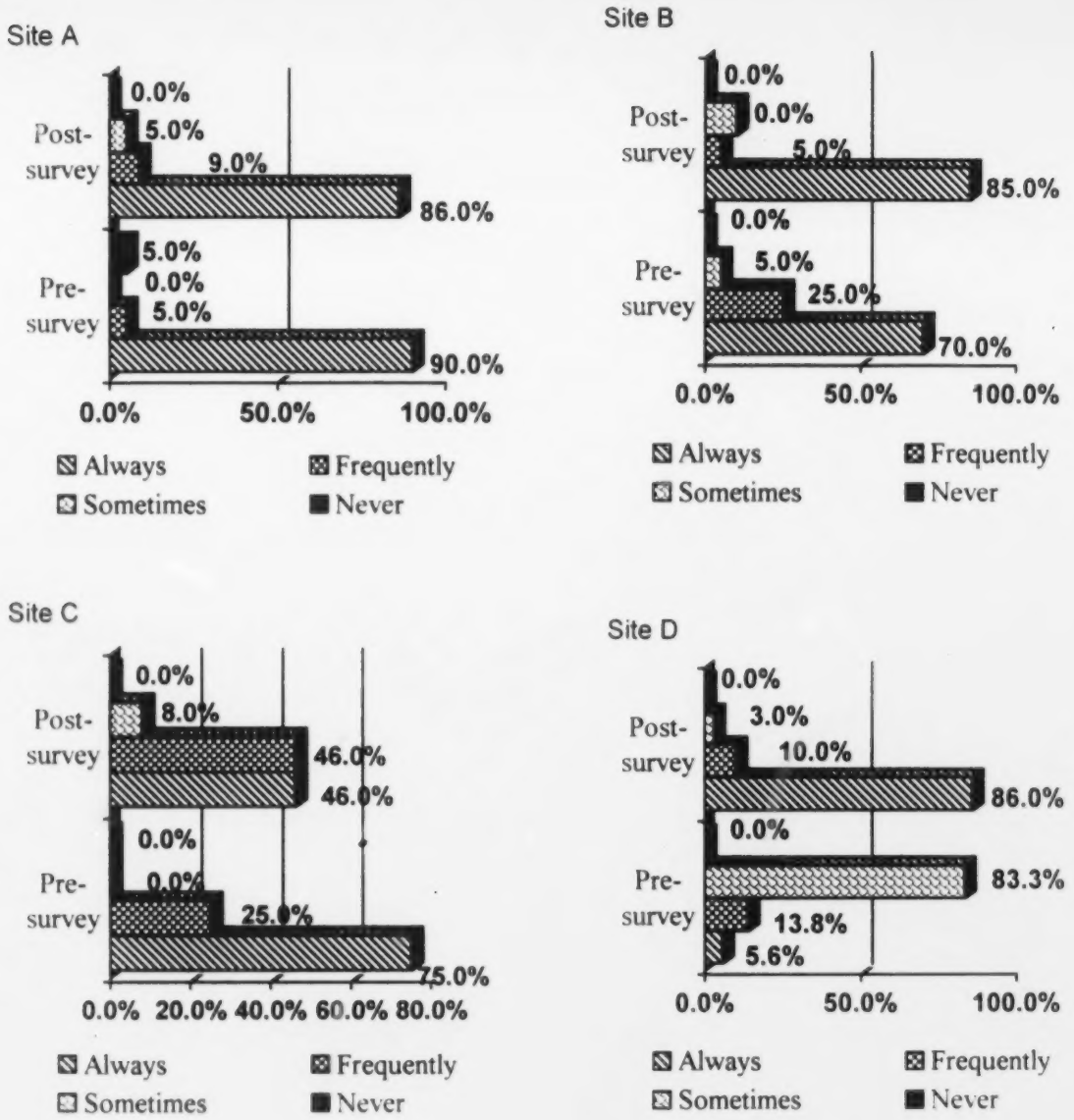


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#3. I complete my homework.

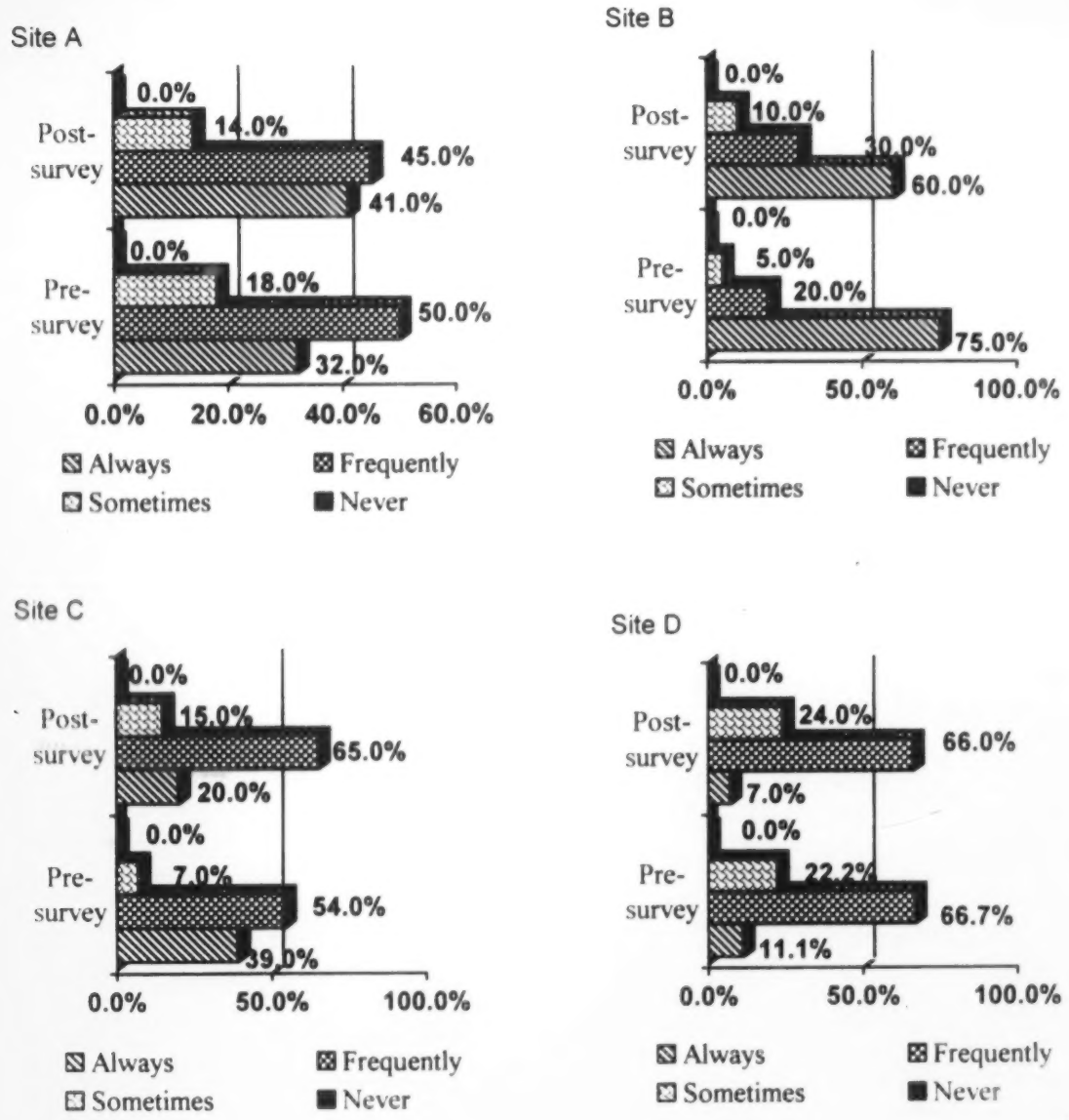


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#4. I complete my homework because ... (circle all that apply)

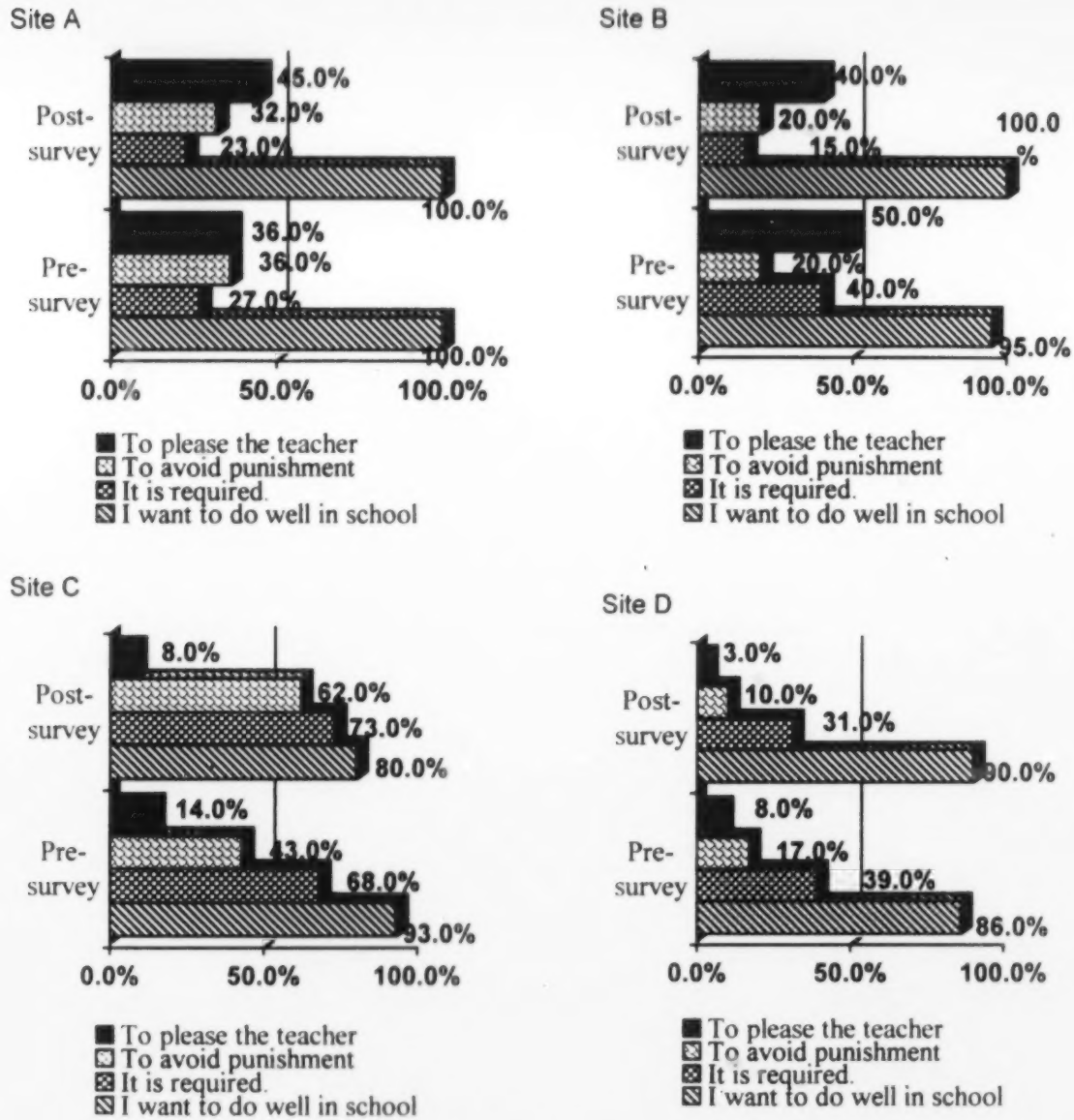


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#5. When I don't complete my homework it is because ... (circle all that apply)

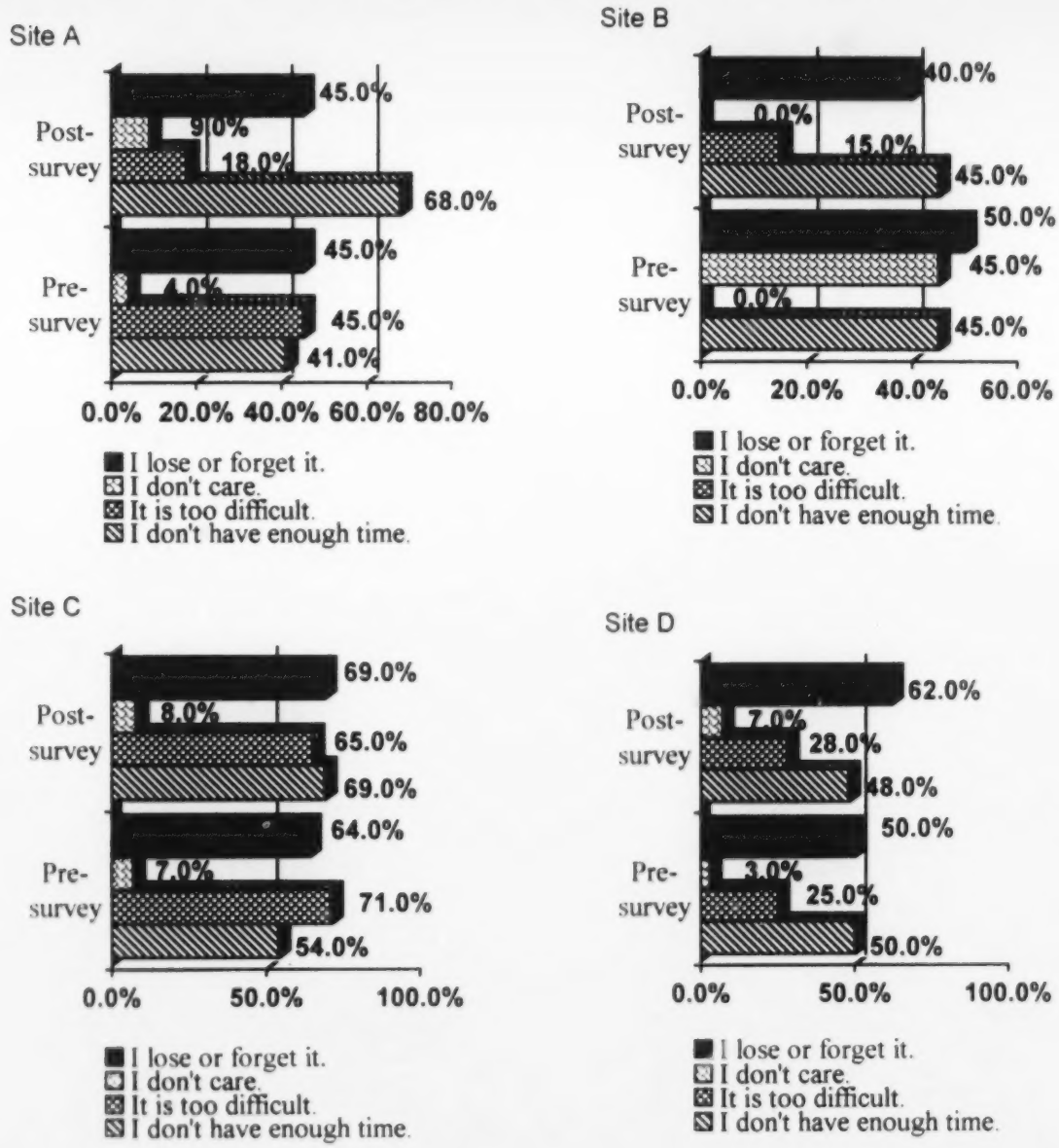


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#6. I have a "homework spot" where I can complete my assignments at home.

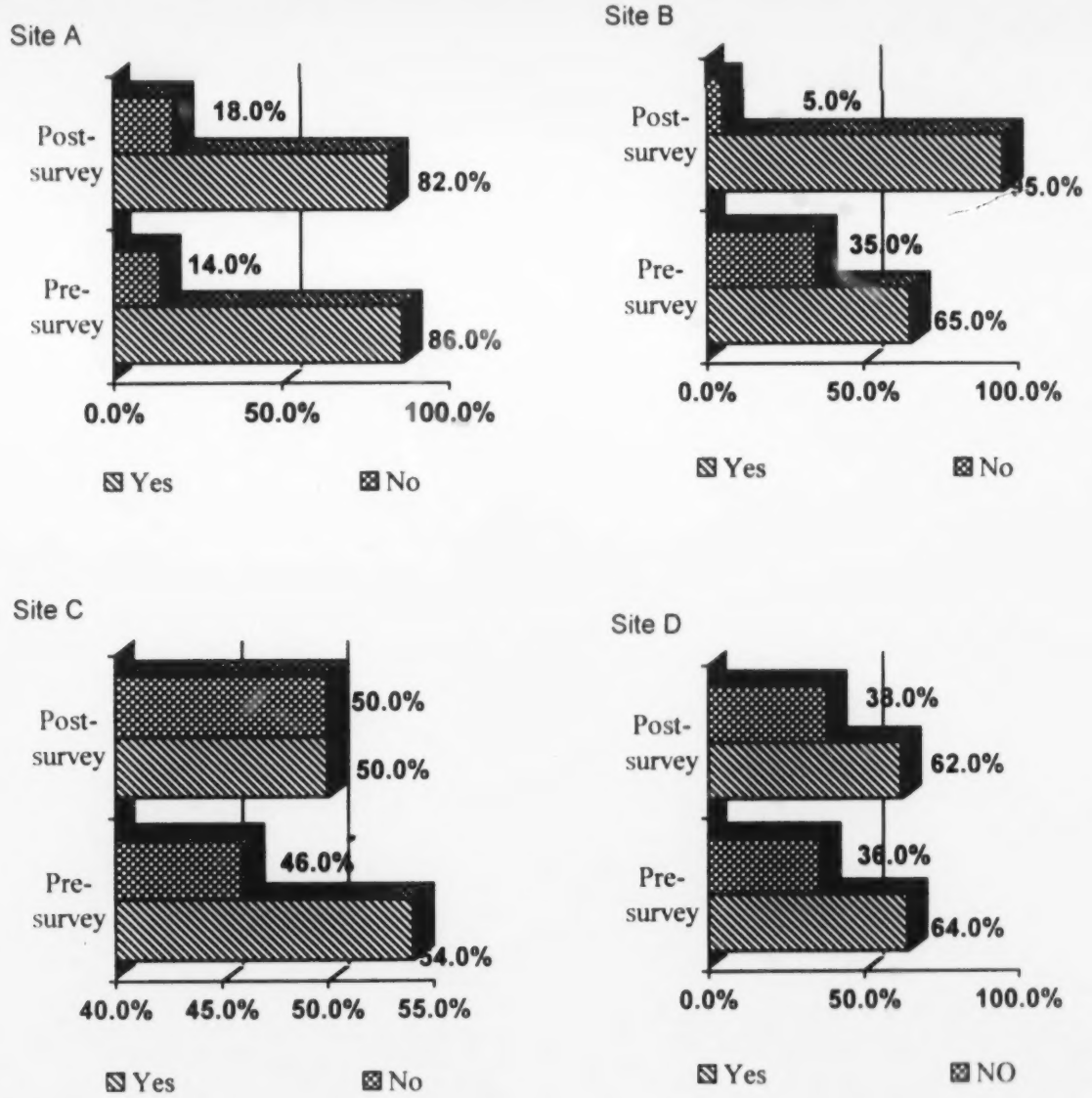


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

#7. I do my homework:

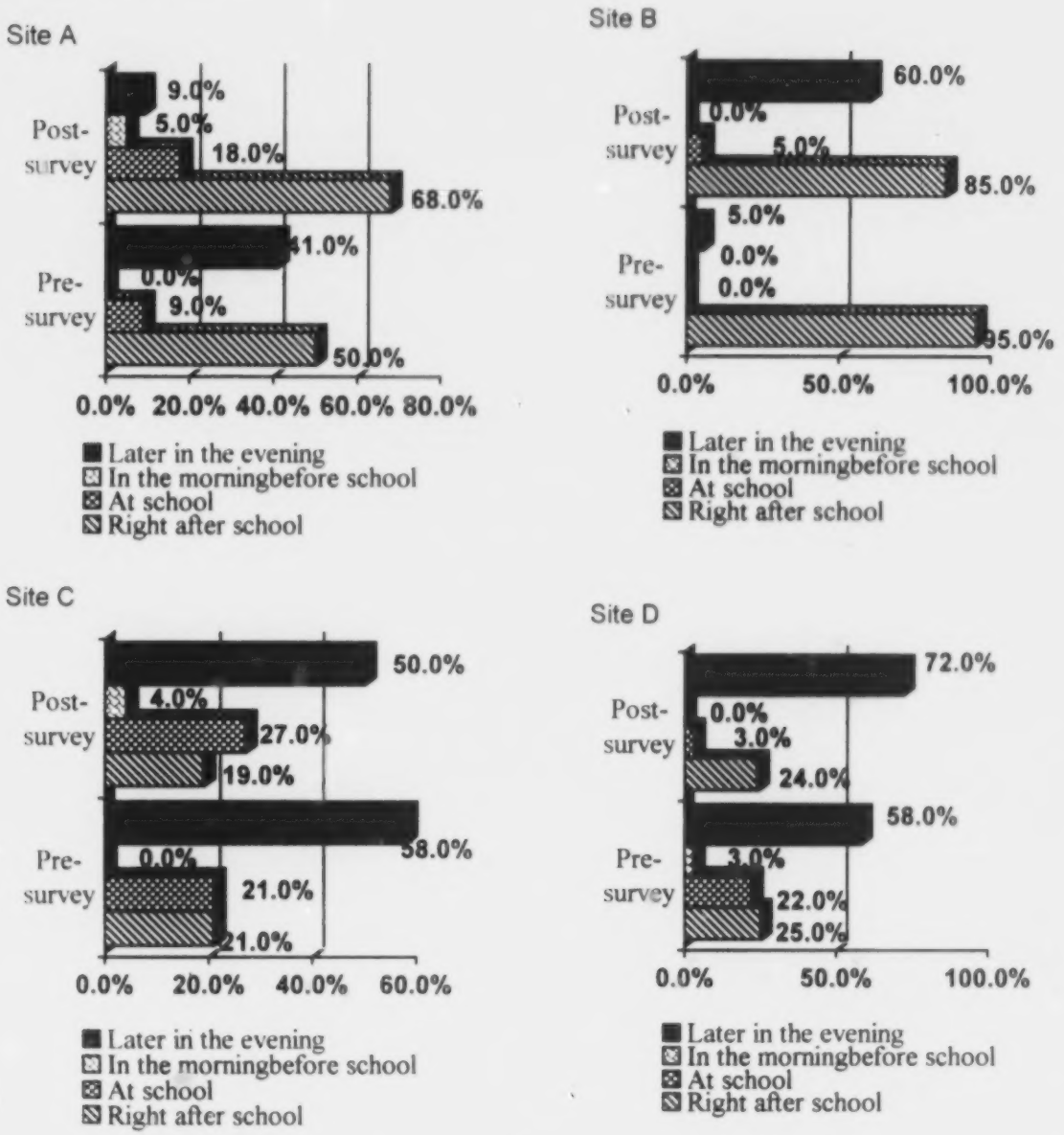


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#8. Homework is hard for me.

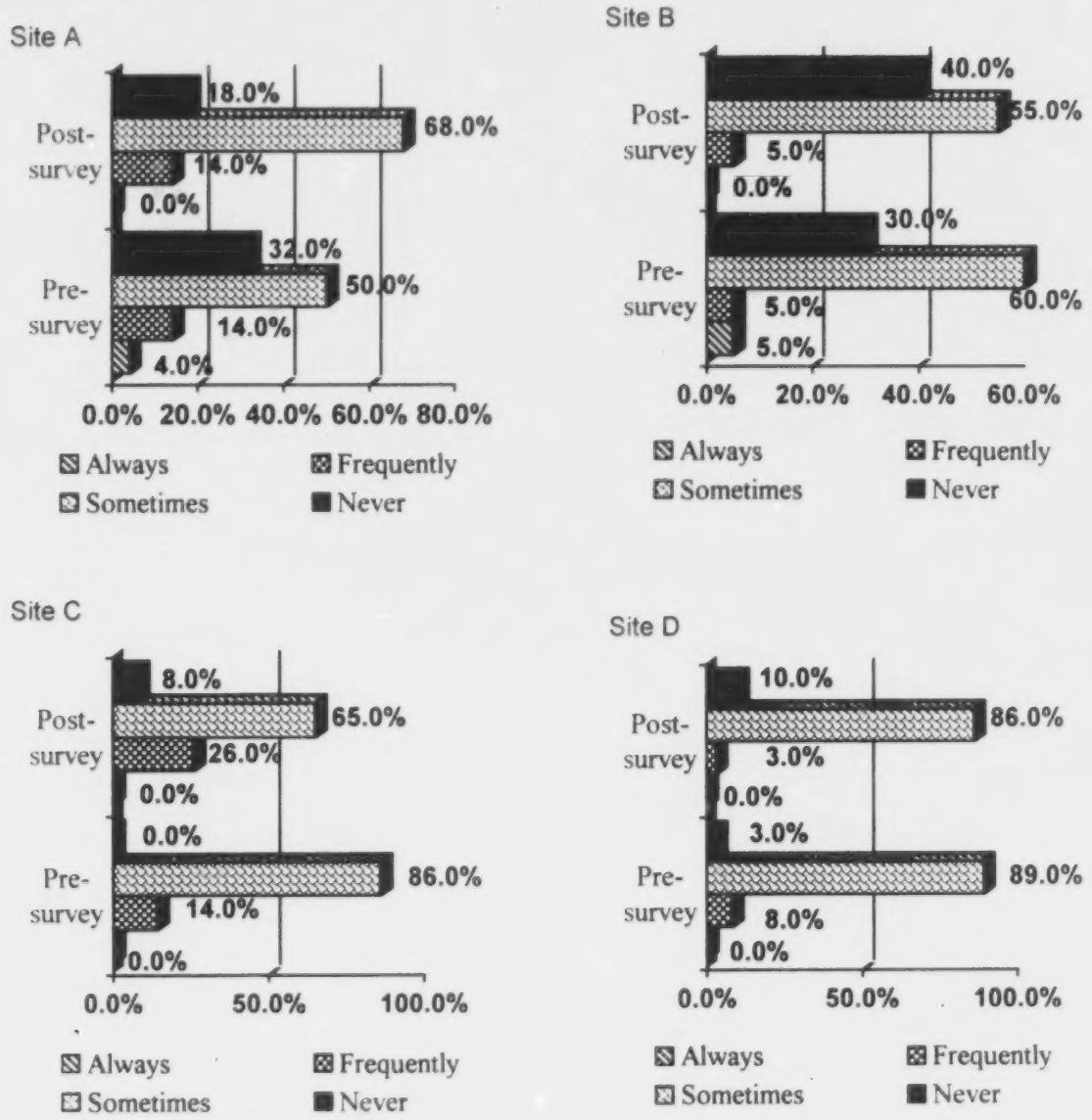


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#9. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework I have.

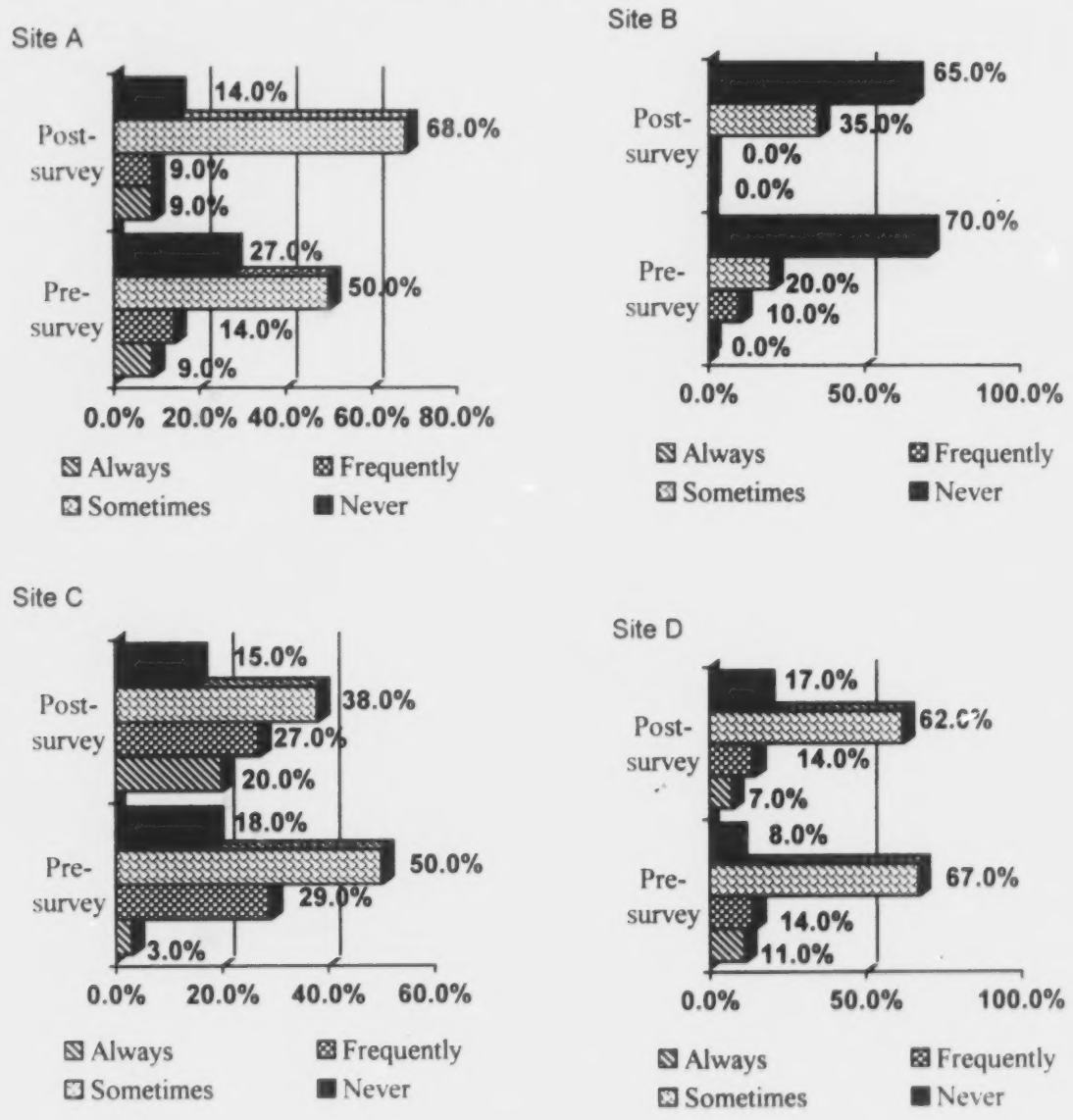


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#10. How many hours a night do you spend on homework?

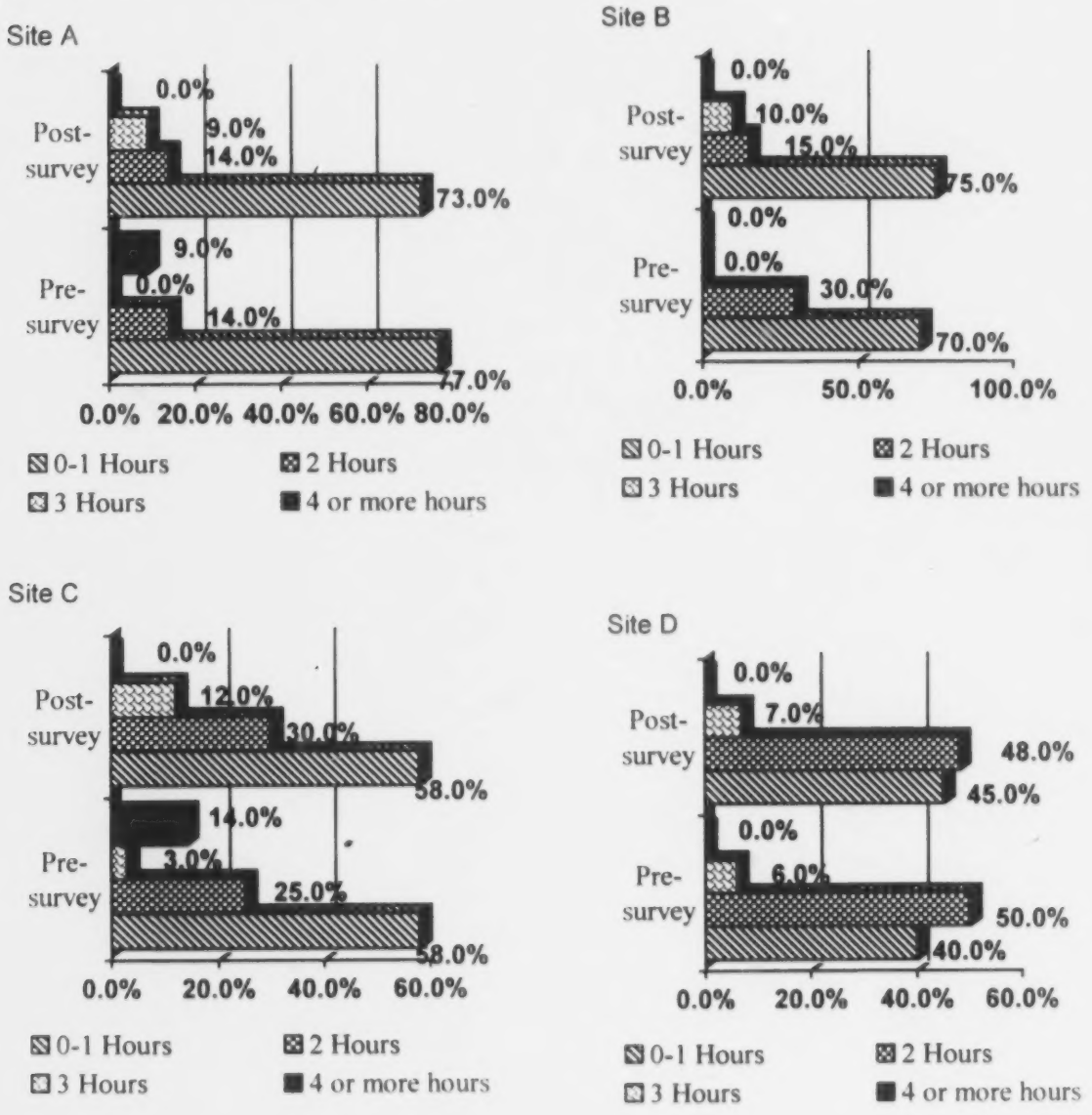


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#11. I have people outside of school who will help me with my homework.

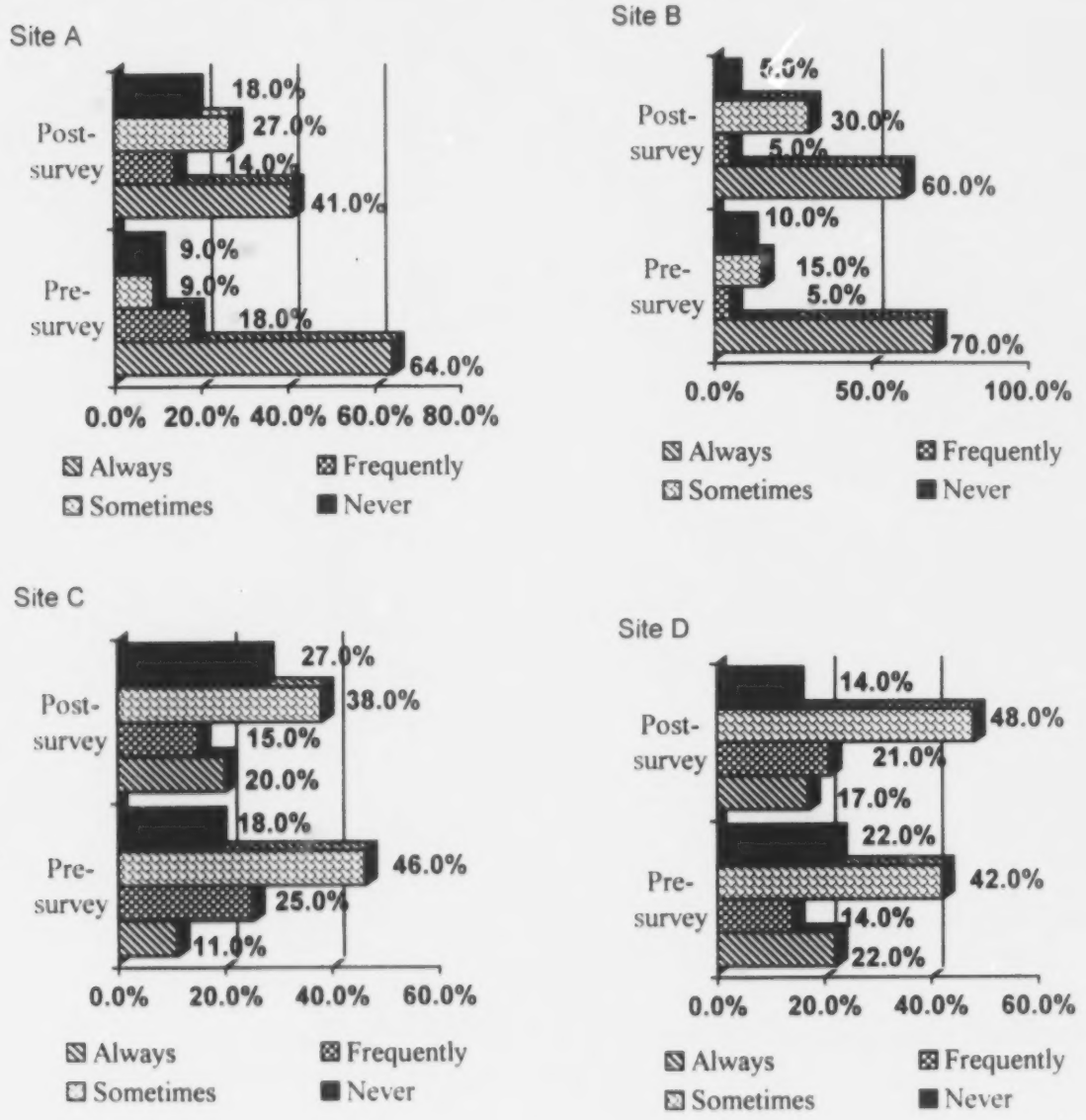


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#12. I show my parents my homework.

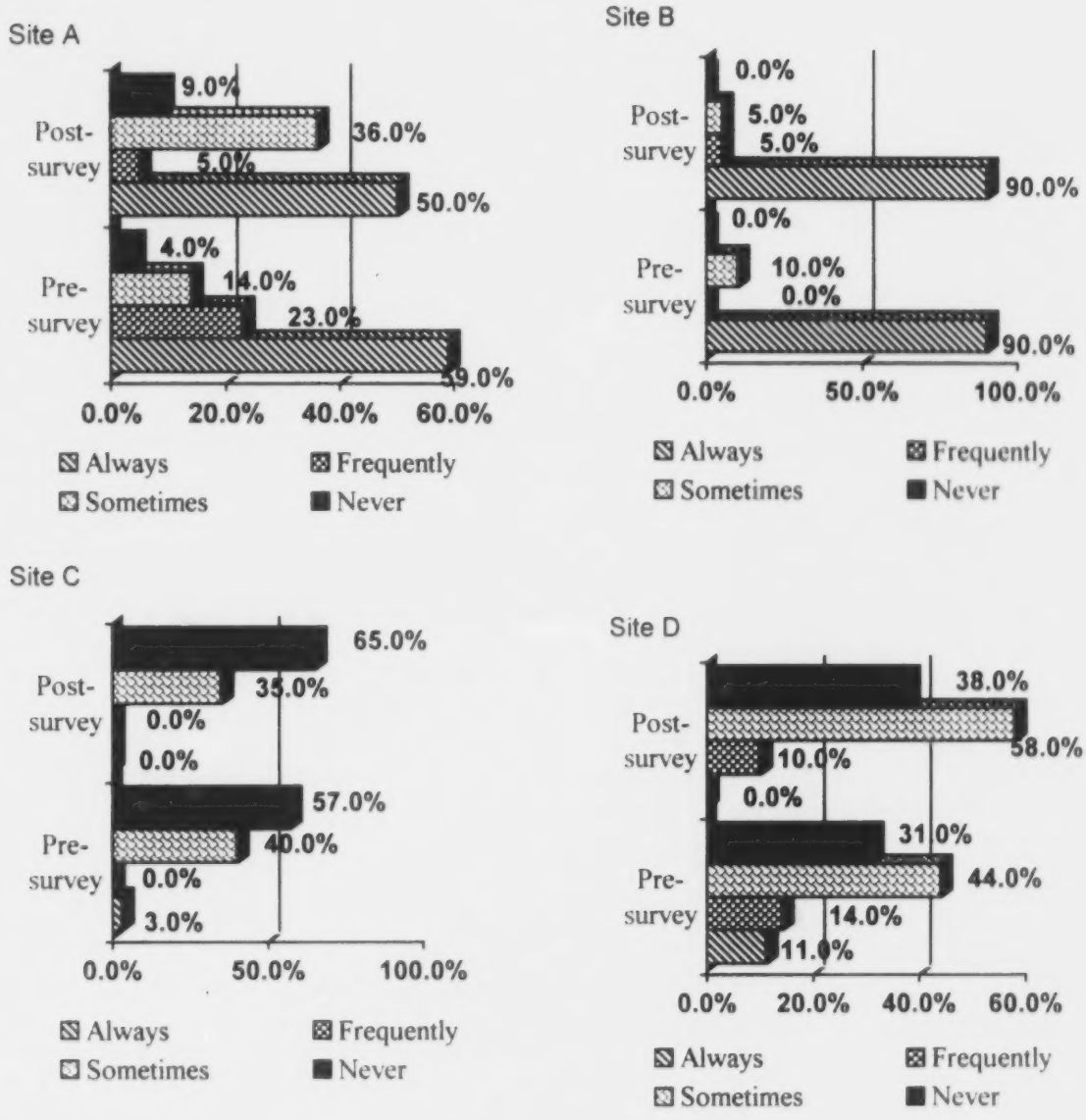


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#13. I show my parents my graded assignments.

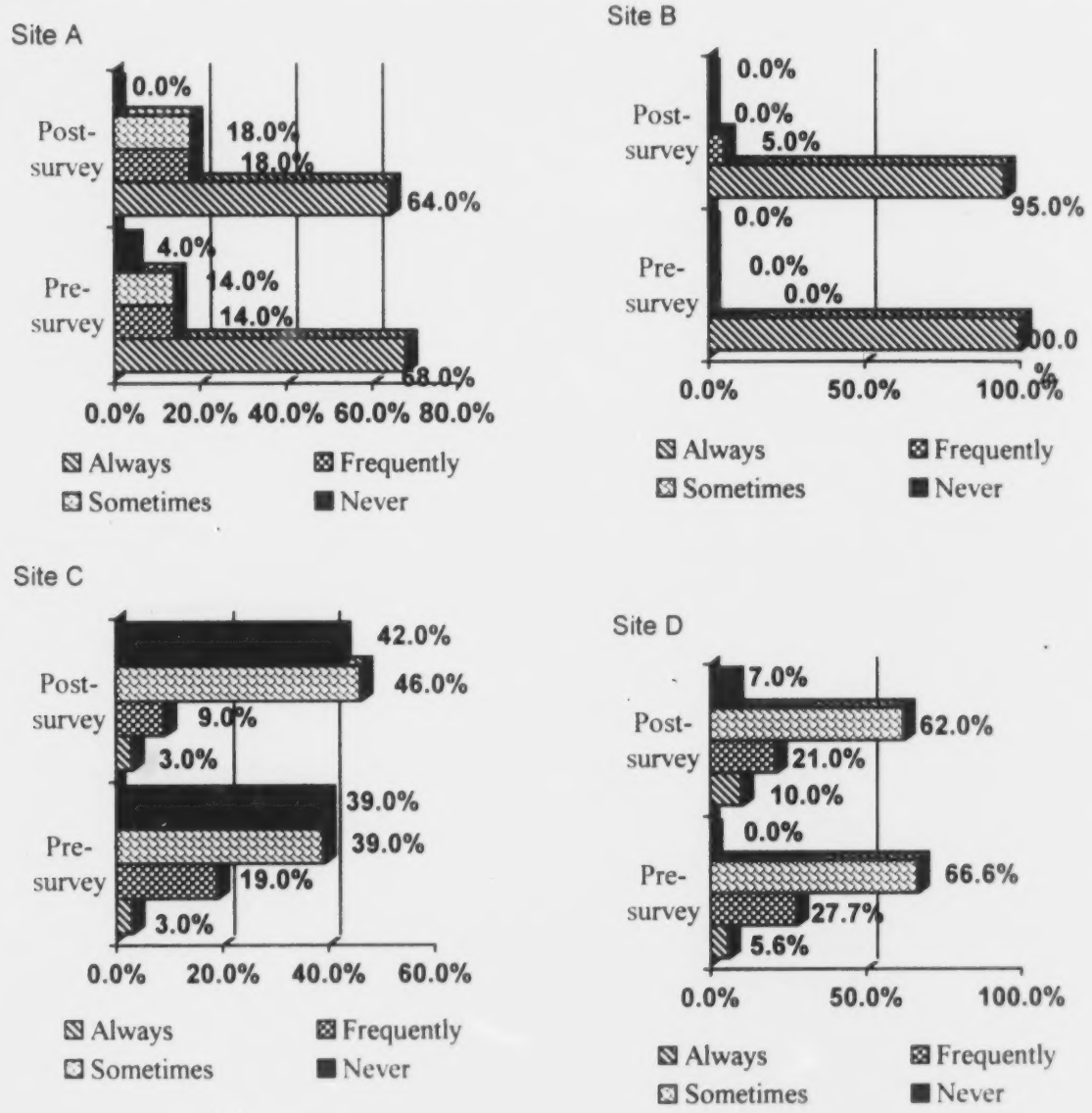


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

Survey results

#14. Which of the following activities do you do outside of school? (circle all that apply)

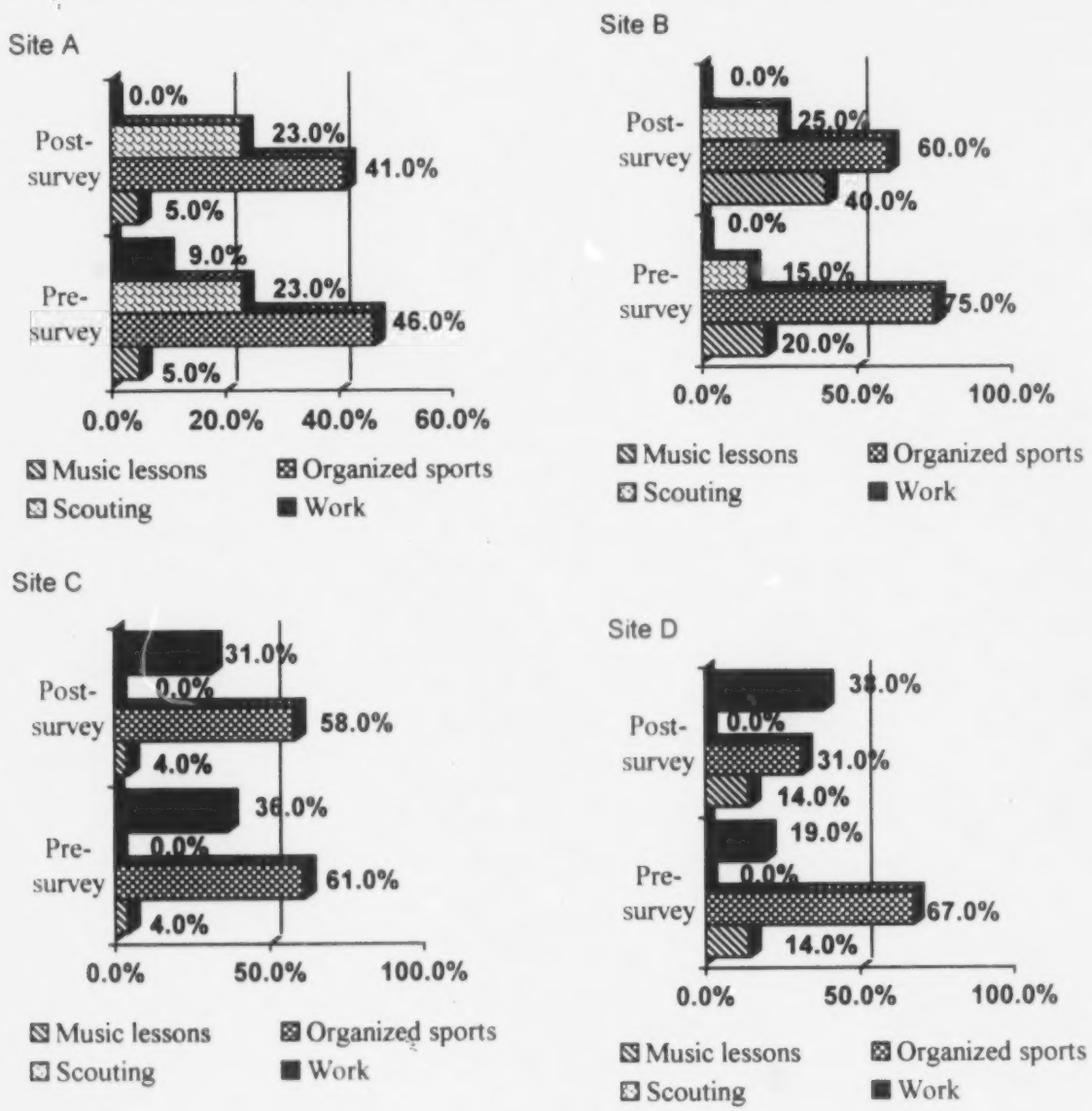


Figure 6: Comparison of Pre and Post Student Survey Results

assignment was completed, a smiley face was entered in the appropriate box. If an assignment was not completed, the word, incomplete, was entered in the box. At the end of each week, students took home the record cards for parents to view. According to parental feedback, the parents overwhelming approved of this monitoring system. It provided a partnership between the home and the school. Many students improved their homework efforts knowing that parents were being informed on a consistent basis.

Furthermore, weekly "no homework" passes were awarded to students who had achieved 100% completion rate (Appendix I). Students could redeem them toward future assignments. Weekly student results were documented on a progress chart posted in the classroom. As time progressed, students openly clapped and verbally praised each other for a job well done. This technique fostered peer recognition and provided a booster for self esteem. Students who reached this level worked diligently to stay there while others were motivated to try harder.

Private student-teacher conferences were also part of the intervention. Students who chronically missed assignments were reminded of their contract obligations and responsibilities. The students were aware that conferencing would continue until positive homework completion records were established. The conferences proved as an incentive for students to complete their homework.

The percentage of homework completion increased by 10% at Site B. Site B concluded that many factors influenced the success of the homework intervention strategies. Direct instruction had a positive impact on the students. It provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their personal homework habits. The individualized

homework contract emphasized the personal commitment and responsibility of each student to complete homework. A parent's signature was required on the contract. The contract actively involved parents in a partnership with their child. The students at Site B responded positively and enthusiastically to homework completion incentives (Appendix I). They anxiously awaited the daily lottery drawing. Homework passes were valued. The personal homework calendar allowed students to keep track of their own progress (Appendix J). The homework check-in system held students accountable to their homework responsibilities. The instructor also noted that individual conferences were effective in helping students identify their difficulties in completing homework.

After analyzing the results of the completed data, it is evident that there was not a significant increase in the submission of homework assignments for the high school students at Site C. There are several factors which contributed to these results. First, it is not unusual at the beginning of a term for students to judiciously turn in assignments since the students are naturally self-motivated by the newness of the semester. Also, the material being introduced in the beginning of the year is not difficult compared to the subject matter taught at the end of the semester. The pre-intervention data was accumulated at the beginning of the school year and reflected the natural motivation of most students to complete assignments during this period. By the time the intervention was nearing completion, the material being taught was much more difficult and much more motivation on the part of the student was necessary for success.

In order to keep student motivation high, a number of incentives were offered to students. The creation and distribution of a homework pass for completing ten

assignments in a row was utilized (Appendix K). This did work to some extent with a few individual students who prior were only turning in half of the completed assignments. Reminding the students who were lax about turning in assignments helped to momentarily strengthen their motivation. It was found that unless the personal encouragement was constant, a few of the less motivated students would lapse back into their former pattern.

From the data, it can be concluded that the students who were not completing assignments at the beginning of the year did not improve in spite of the strategies introduced in the study skill unit and incentives offered. The highly motivated students have continued practicing the study skills acquired during the direct instruction throughout the past semester. Their effort has been reflected by their grades.

Based upon the presentation of data dealing with homework completion, the intervention increased student's motivation to complete homework by 3% at Site D. This intervention plan seemed to be less successful for the high school sites. The students at Site D often complained of a lack of time to complete their homework do to outside interests such as work as noted in survey question fourteen (Figure 6). Quite often, a general apathy toward school was recognized in many students. Anecdotal evidence supporting this include students passing up extra credit opportunities, failure of students to make up missed work, the amount of homework turned in late, and various student comments and complaints.

By increasing the amount of parental involvement at Site D, the intervention would have been more successful. According to statement 12 in the pre-survey (Figure 6), the same students to report showing their parents their homework are those students who

had a grade of an "A" in the class at the pre-intervention level. This continued in the post-intervention survey (Figure 6) where no grades of "A" were present and no students reported showing their homework to their parents in statement 12.

In conclusion, the Action Plan implemented to increase student motivation in order to complete homework assignments was more successful at the elementary school level than at the high school level. Factors that contributed to its success at the elementary level were the direct instruction of organizational and study skills, the development of an individualized homework contract, the daily use of a homework check-in system supported by incentives, the use of individual conferencing to improve homework responsibilities, and the intentional involvement of parents in the homework process.

In the future, the researchers feel that it is extremely important to continue to stress the teaching of homework and organizational skills coupled with increasing parental involvement. All sites believed that these were the most successful and influential parts of the intervention for the students. The instructors will continue to strive for their students to become aware of successful strategies for organizing and completing their homework. It has been strongly reinforced by the researchers experience that parental involvement had a positive influence on student success. This will become the instructors' continuing mission. At the elementary level, the intervention will be continued as implemented. The high school sites will continue to teach direct instruction of homework skills, use the homework pass as a student motivation strategy, and communicate with parents concerning student homework responsibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Permission Consent Letter

Saint Xavier University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
"Increasing Student Motivation to Complete Homework Assignments"

The purpose of this brief survey is to determine students' attitudes toward completing homework. The study is being done by_____ who can be reached at _____ at xxx-xxxx. The information you provide will be used to help institute new procedures in order to encourage students to complete homework assignments. There are no right or wrong answers and how you respond will have no impact on your grade in this course. If you agree to participate, you will complete the survey which will take approximately 10 minutes during class. Survey results are confidential.

If you agree to participate, please sign the form below:

I, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the investigator has explained to me the need for this research, identified prolblems which may occur, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this study. I understand all information gathered during the survey will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

_____
Name of Minor Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

Appendix B
Beginning of Study Student Survey

Beginning of Study Survey

Please circle the choice that best describes how you feel about each of the following items.

1.) I enjoy school.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

2.) I care about my grades.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

3.) I complete my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

4.) I complete my homework because (circle all that apply)....

* I want to do well in school
* It is required.
* To avoid punishment.
* To please the teacher.

Please list below any other reasons you may have.

_____

_____

5.) When I don't complete my homework it is because (circle all that apply)...

* I don't have enough time.
* It is too difficult.
* I don't care.
* I lose or forget it.

Please list below any other reasons you may have.

_____

_____

6.) I have a "homework spot" where I can complete my assignments at home.

YES NO

Appendix B continued

7.) I do my homework:

* Right after school
* At school
* In the morning before school.
* Later in the evening.

8.) Homework is hard for me.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

9.) I feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework I have.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

10.) How many hours a night do you spend on homework?

0-1 hours 2 hours 3 hours 4 or more hours

11.) I have people outside of school who are there to help me with my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

12.) I show my parents my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

13.) I show my parents my graded assignments.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

14.) Which of the following activities do you do outside of school? (circle all that apply)

* Music lessons
* Organized Sports
* Scouting.
* Work

Please list any other activities. _____

_____

15.) What do you like to do in your spare time?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C
Homework Completion Record Form

ASSIGNMENT NUMBER:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
ASSIGNMENT CATEGORY:															
ASSIGNMENT VALUE:															
1.															
2.															
3.															
4.															
5.															
6.															
7.															
8.															
9.															
10.															
11.															
12.															
13.															
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24.															
25.															
26.															
27.															
28.															
29.															
30.															

ASSIGNMENTS

1.	11.
2.	12.
3.	13.
4.	14.
5.	15.
6.	16.
7.	17.
8.	18.
9.	19.
10.	20.

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Appendix D
Teacher Journal Form

Week of _____

Actions Taken:

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed):

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Homework Contract

Doing my homework is important.

This is my own plan.

_____

_____

_____

_____

When my work is finished, my teacher will

_____

_____

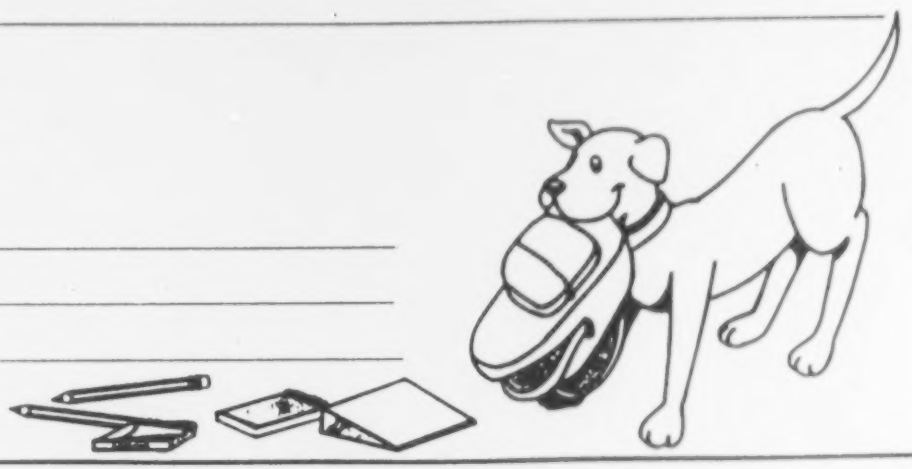
Now, let's shake hands.

We've made a plan!

My signature:_____

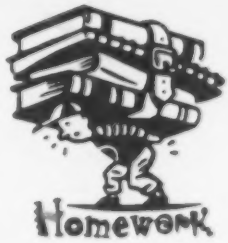
My parent's signature:_____

My teacher's signature:_____



Appendix F
Secondary Homework Contract

HOMEWORK CONTRACT



Consider the knowledge you have gained about homework. Make decisions about where, when, and how you can best complete your homework. Develop a plan that you can follow and that you belive will help make you a more successful student. Detail that plan below and explain it to a friend. When you think you have the best plan for you, have your consultant sign under your signature and turn it in to your teacher for his/her signature.

My plan for success in homework:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

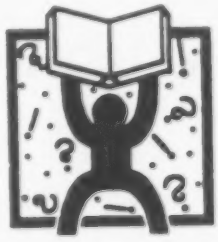
_____

Student Signature_____

Date_____

Witness signature_____

Teacher Signature_____



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Appendix G
Post Intervention Student Survey

End of Study Survey

Please circle the choice that best describes how you feel about each of the following items.

1.) I enjoy school.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

2.) I care about my grades.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

3.) I complete my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

4.) I complete my homework because (circle all that apply)....

* I want to do well in school
* It is required.
* To avoid punishment.
* To please the teacher.

Please list below any other reasons you may have.

_____

_____

5.) When I don't complete my homework it is because (circle all that apply)...

* I don't have enough time.
* It is too difficult.
* I don't care.
* I lose or forget it.

Please list below any other reasons you may have.

_____

_____

6.) I have a "homework spot" where I can complete my assignments at home.

YES NO

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Appendix G continued

7.) I do my homework:

* Right after school
* At school
* In the morning before school.
* Later in the evening.

8.) Homework is hard for me.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

9.) I feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework I have.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

10.) How many hours a night do you spend on homework?

0-1 hours 2 hours 3 hours 4 or more hours

11.) I have people outside of school who are there to help me with my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

12.) I show my parents my homework.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

13.) I show my parents my graded assignments.

Always Frequently Sometimes Never

14.) Which of the following activities do you do outside of school? (circle all that apply)

* Music lessons
* Organized Sports
* Scouting.
* Work

Please list any other activities. _____

_____

15.) What do you like to do in your spare time?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix H
Homework Card

Week of: _____ Teacher's Signature _____

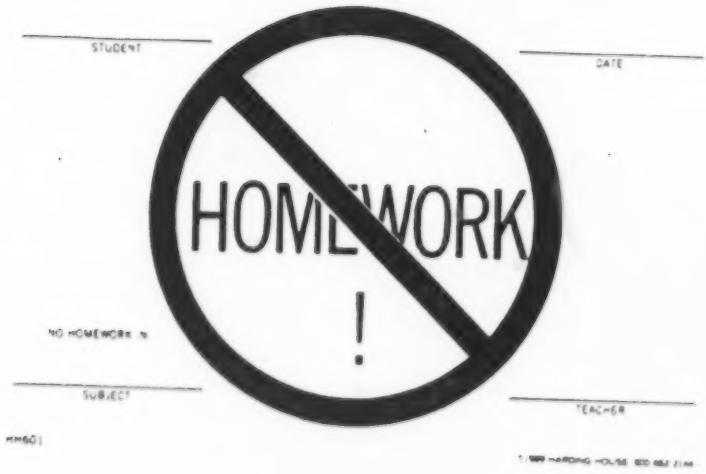
_____ Name

Homework Record

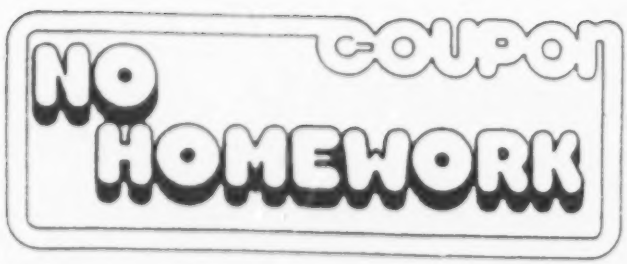
Subject	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Reading					
Math					
English					
Spelling					
Social Studies					
Science					
Health					

Appendix I
Homework Pass

Homework Pass
Site A



Homework Pass
Site B



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Appendix J
Homework Calendar

September 98

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7 Labor Day No school	8	9	10	11	12
13 Grandparents' Day	14	15	16	17	18	19
20 Rosh Hashanah begins	21	22	23	24 Board of Education 7:30 p.m.	25	26
27	28 Iowa Test of Basic Skills, grades 4 – 7. Sept. 28 – Oct. 8	29	30			

October 98

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Iowa Test of Basic Skills, grades 4 – 7, continues	2	3
4	5 Iowa Test of Basic Skills, grades 4 – 7, ends Oct. 8	6	7	8	9 Teacher Institute No school	10
11	12 Columbus Day No school	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22 Board of Education 7:30 p.m.	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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Appendix J continued

November 98

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

American Education Week

December 98

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Winter break. December 21 - January 1. No school

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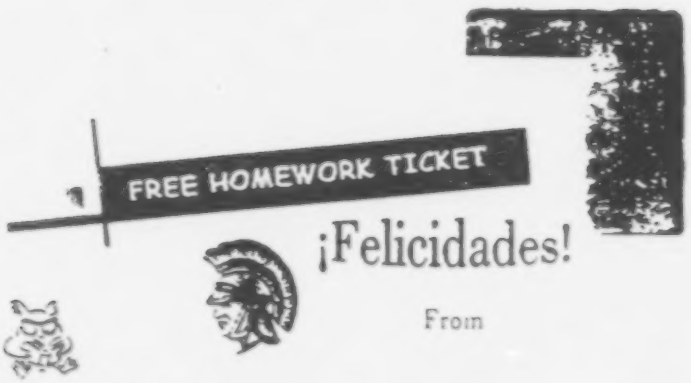
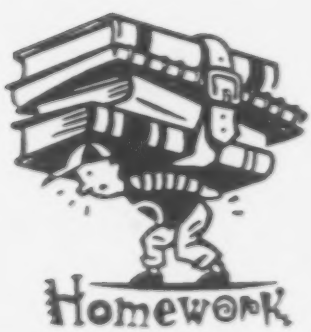
Appendix K
Homework Pass

Homework Pass
Site C



Homework Pass
Site D



Your good grades have
earned you a break!
This pass may be
redeemed (accompanied
by an ID) with
for one free hom.ework.
CONGRATULATIONS!